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·ALICE BROWN·

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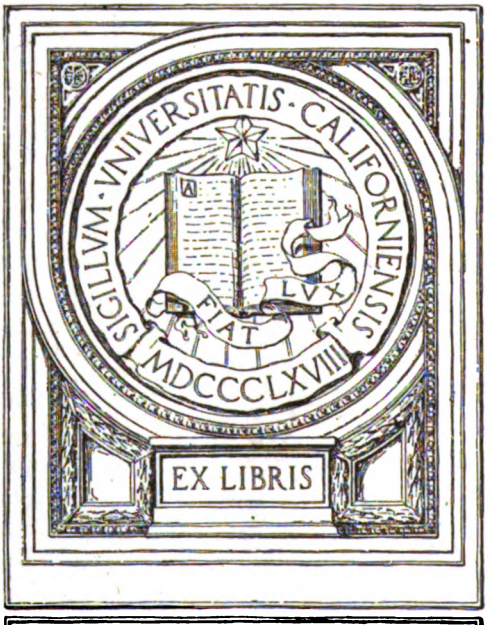

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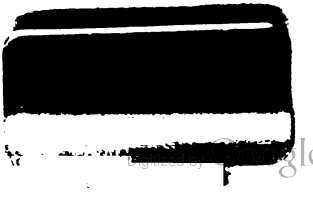

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MY LOVE AND I

BY

ALICE BROWN
"MARTIN REDFIELD"

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1914

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Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1912. Reprinted November, 1914.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

English Alumnus

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MY LOVE AND I

I

I AM allowing myself the free-handed luxury of writing what seems to me the truth. So far as facts go, the narrative is to be as literal as I can make it, and that, dealing with so shifting a phenomenon as a life, is about as difficult a piece of work as you could well undertake. For the minute we look attentively at our own actions, the great temptations begin to sway us. Our sympathies with our own doings are magnets, and draw the mobile human shape to this side and that, to make it fit some model of the meritorious man. We are seized with that childish and pathetic desire to account for ourselves to our own credit. If there are smudges on the page, it would be almost beyond human fortitude not to rub them out.

So far also as emotions go, this account is to be as exact as I can make it. And here it may be I shall not get so far out of the way. For I am a writer, and if ever the human machine is cognizant of itself, if ever it can record its own speed, its erratic by-play and recovery, it is that machine made up of varying facilities which a writer uses in his work. It is of a sort

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that records unconsciously the scratches of time, the wash of the years, in a way comparable only to the inscribing of palimpsests. There are the records, one over another. Finally the brain snatches them out and knits them into her intent. Some are even used as they are, in what stands for imaginative work, but all are likely to be transmuted by some magic deftness of the mind, and made to serve. This talent, or genius, if you will, in the few unforgettable cases, this habit of hoarding impressions and working them over like precious lumber, is of a delicate sort and really feminine. It betrays the feminine responsiveness to emotion, the feminine absorption in detail. For whereas a man of normal temperament may be passionately in love, for example, and when he is out of love retain only a blurred disorder of memory, a man with the equipment to achieve the written word has automatically recorded the weather of his passion, and could paint you the cloud wrack of it on a day of calm. Therefore, it being my trade to write, I have some hope of reproducing the complexion of my past so that I may see the tale is, if not good, at least faithful to what was.

I am told there are no adequate memoirs. That may very well be. Our confidences become instinctively a game of excuse and accusation. We love ourselves too well, or we are at least too deeply grounded in the long game of self-nurture and defence. We kicked over the traces, did we? Well, we must fish

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up a reason for it, and the reason cannot, in the spectacular nature of things, be said to take root in our own meanness or self-love. We have to paint ourselves for exhibition as we hope God is painting us every day for presentation to his angels in that personal last judgment which, to our ingenuous egotism, centres about each one of us. That being so, that we are creatures bound in some degree to seem as well as to be, we can hardly hope for more than partial candor. But we may do what we can to draw the lines straight enough to satisfy our inward censor, knowing that, if a man has lived without vanity (the normal degree of it necessary to prop self-preservation and keep his feathers oiled for the public eye), he stands more than the average chance at painting his own portrait without flattery.

I was born in New England, of the ordinary self-respecting farmer and his wife, and I, unlike them, was urged from the beginning of conscious life, by the desire to advance, to go somewhere that is not here, to know something that is not this, and to do unproven things, all probably included in the phrase my mother used when she presented the case to my father: "make something" of myself. They could do nothing for me beyond keeping me well fed and reasonably obedient. They had summoned me into the world with no hesitancy over the sort of creature I was likely to prove, and I disconcerted them, not because I was so clever

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or so pious or so phenomenally anything, as that I wanted things I did not have. But after all, these hungers were for roads. I wanted to climb into roads and travel in them. The school reader hinted of roads. There were singers, it implied in a maddening by-the-way (it should either have said more or nothing at all!), painters, men that wrote music and men that wrote poetry. I never read even these commonplaces of invitation without a foretokening thrill. I think perhaps it was the sense of wonder in me, the urge of an unproven self that wanted it knew not what. And sometimes I read poetry of a sort — the bigger poets I hardly heard of until I grew up — and that gave me another kind of thrill, the one you might have if you came upon a regiment of men, taller than any you had ever seen, and in armor perhaps, marching. You would know you could not be among them because you were not tall enough and you had no armor, but the sight would be tremendous to you. I can see now that I was a lonely boy because of this desiring things that were not. I was, too, by the grace of God and my mother's kindness, a wholesome one, more solitary still in the brutal curiosities of the country school. I was a sinewy whelp, loving all the things outside four walls, and I grew up big-limbed and strong. I do not think I loved my father and mother very much until I was perhaps fifteen, and then my father died, and I found myself wondering a good deal, in uncounselled work about the farm, as to what kind of man he had

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been. He seemed, in dying, to have cast upon me a heavy and yet a worthy task of being something more than I had expected to be while I was yet a boy, of taking on myself the necessity of standing beside my mother very stiff and strong. And then I began to see that my mother was dear to me and needed kindness in her lack of bodily courage, and that gave me so much tenderness for her that it was a poignant thing, and I loved the sight of her, and would sometimes touch her dress as she went by me, with a shy affection; but that perhaps she never knew. I had thought of myself as working on the farm in the summer and teaching school in the winter, to put myself through college in the way the older generations did. It all seemed perfectly easy, because I saw no end to my rushing vitality, the force with which the blood pelted through my veins, and I knew I should suffer no stone in my track to turn me, no mountain even. I had found that men were turned back sometimes by pebbles too. I did not know then that some pebbles are magnetized to an unexpected power. But these dreams, if dreams they were, so did they clothe themselves in the bright veil of certainties, had to yield. With my father's death I was suddenly the man on whom the course of life depended, pushed forward by life itself into the van of homely action. Even in the winter I was too busy foddering the cattle, shovelling paths, cutting wood, to follow the routine of district school without long breaks: to go away to an academy, as I had once

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intended, was impossible. But I studied long and hard in the winter nights, with a futile selection of books packed away in the house. I studied algebra, and knew Gibbon almost by heart, "Paradise Lost," too, and "Pilgrim's Progress." Still in the midst of my young despair, I had an idea I should attain, that I should sometime sight the beginning of those foreordained roads that lead to unseen goals, lands that are not so much happiness, perhaps, as broader spaces, free air, and the chance to find more roads, and these interminable. Sometimes I felt an unreasoning anger against the barriers that hemmed me in. This was not because I thought for a moment of stepping out of my place as my mother's man, but because the odds against my getting learning and advancement grew so horribly great. And then there came the February morning when my mother could not get up from her bed, and the next morning when she died and left me groping in a world forlorn. I had not relinquished my ambitions, if ambitions they were, this quest of the unknown road, but I suddenly saw they had no point. The little warm glow that kept the heart of them beating was gone. I came flat up against a hundred easements I had promised myself to buy for my mother when I at last made good. I had meant to take her away from the farm, and settle her in a little suburban house — how philistine my choice would have been then I know well — a little house, because she had always done her own work, and would not have been

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at ease with hired service, a house where there was yard enough to hang the clothes and make a garden, but itself chiefly to be recommended for its sunny kitchen and running water and all the other aids to comfortable tasks. She was also to have a black silk dress and a cameo pin — my tastes were regulated by the prosperous in our surroundings — and now she had gone in a kind of cruel haste, and I had hardly money enough to buy her coffin. I remember the one small comfort I got at the time was from Jessie Brown, the minister's daughter, because she cried hard at my mother's funeral, and the next day came over while I was eating the remains of the funeral dinner with a dry mouth and wondering if all food was going to taste like this forever now that mother was not here — Jessie arrived running, the sun on her thin freckled face, and eagerness in her eyes, to say her mother wanted me to come over to dinner. There was apple pudding, and it was real good. I shook my head. I found it hard to speak. And Jessie lingered a few minutes and seemed about to cry. But though I was grateful to her for crying as she had yesterday — it seemed a tribute to my mother to find the minister's daughter set her at such worth — I felt I could not bear it to-day. So I told her the apple pudding would be cold, and she suddenly stopped looking sorry and said I was a horrid boy, and went home.

Now I had my life before me, and kindly farmers came to tell me what to do with it. But what I did do was to pack a queer old bag with my clothes and

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mother's little thin teaspoons, and tell uncle Hardy he might carry on the farm and give me whatever my half of it would bring in. And I took train for Boston, with exactly seven dollars in my pocket, and that was borrowed. Uncle Hardy had just that amount in his old desk, and he gave it to me as soon as I asked him. And when I found out that seven dollars would last me, and that by living on bread alone, about two weeks in Boston, I shipped on board a vessel bound for the West Indies, and after being well mauled and inducted into the use the world has for an ignorant young lubber with magnificent muscles trained to nothing, I left her at Trinidad, and there, after the *Fair Weather* had sailed, I got work at the stables of the Hotel Tivoli, and in this I continued some months until a good man got hold of me. This was Egerton Sims, an Englishman who had been a sport in his day, and was a scholar as well. But now he found himself cruelly crippled by a misfortune that was not so much a fear with him as something he had to provide against, as you would take a stout stick with you if you were going to encounter a hostile beast. He had attacks of an excruciating pain of the heart, and for that reason he was disinclined to be alone in the open and far from help. Yet it chafed him to assume a keeper, a man of inferior parts who would obtrude upon him an unsympathetic presence. And one day it was I who brought his horse to him, and he made some remark about the girth, and I answered him in

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perhaps too free a way for custom: for, being New England bred, I could never get away from New England's old ideas. He looked at me suddenly and sharply. My tone was respectful enough, I am sure, for I had no pleasure in holding myself above my business; but that all men are, so far as their rights go, equal, ran with my blood. He asked me my name, and I told it,—my full name, Martin Redfield. And the next day some one else was sent up with his horse, and he asked for me. And then he arranged to have "the boy Redfield" ride with him. At first it was a little behind him, very properly, and then, as he questioned me, I had to edge nearer, and finally we rode abreast. I rode like a lout, though I could manage a horse, being both strong and having a delicate touch and some general sense of an animal's nature. But he set himself to teach me, with great patience, to ride like a gentleman. It was not long before he succeeded to a nicety, and then he was pleased, and regarded me with an especial kindness, as we look upon our own work. He was a very handsome man, so I heard the kitchen wenches say, but I should have known myself that he satisfied to the full every idea of what a gentleman should be. He had a distinguished profile, he was iron-gray, and his bearing I coveted for myself, even if I must have taken his years with it. (Gladly would I have done that, for when we are young and malcontent we have no hesitation in lightly bidding for the state of the old. To us it is no more than a nearness

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to a dramatic end.) For a time he asked me no further question than where I was born, how old I was, and why I had come to Trinidad. He himself had come, he said, because he had been ordered to a tropical climate, and this, being under English rule, suited him, or, as I afterwards interpreted, left him less forlorn. But one day he asked how I would like to leave the stables and become his personal attendant.

"A valet?" I asked.

I pronounced the word according to my own ideas, but he gave no sign of noticing, since we were as yet master and pupil in the matter of horsemanship only. Yes, he supposed it was being a valet, if it had to be defined. I shook my head. In those days I set up queer distinctions. I had no bones about being stable boy, but I fancied personal attendance on even so excelling a personage as this ill fitted what was before me. He pressed the question. Why didn't I want to be a "man"? And it came out that I didn't know, but that I vaguely felt it wouldn't quite do. It seemed to block the road to somewhere. And then it was that he asked me bluntly:—

"Well, what are you going to do?"

And I, like a simple ass, said I was going to write books. We were near home then and he reined in his horse a little and glanced round at me.

"So!" he said gravely.

I must have looked a softie, with nothing apparent of power about me but the strength of my arms and legs.

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The cook had told me only that morning that I had handsome eyes. I hated her for it. It was almost as if she had laid hands on me, and I hurried out of the kitchen at an undignified trot, hearing all the way the repetition, —

"Handsome brown eyes, Redfield!"

Probably, for I had had no hardening yet, save that of grief, they might have looked like the soft eyes of an animal still wild, sometimes with fear of civilization in them, sometimes beseechment that I might not be caught. I have often thought of myself since as I must have seemed to Egerton Sims: what a mush of youth and asininity, all puppydom, and he hardened to the game of life, up to its tricks every time, and himself playing fair if his adversary were the devil. He looked me over as if he were going to buy me, looked even down to the horse's legs as if he might buy him. A black woman with a parrot on her wrist got in the way, in her eagerness to sell the bunch of feathered gold and scarlet, and while we drew aside for her some coolies went past, all a dusk and silence of the East. I often think of the picture because it was the background when my life was mapped. Then the little coil of circumstance untangled, and we rode on. Egerton Sims said no more then, but that night he sent for me to come to his room where he sat smoking. I remember now that he asked me to sit down, and that previously, when I had been summoned to take orders about the horses, I had been allowed to stand, very appropriately

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though awkwardly, for I was at that time chiefly at ease when I was using my hands in the open. I must have looked a lout to him, but he asked me with a kind consideration I have always loved him for, and very gravely, —

"How would you like to be my private secretary?"

To my everlasting discredit, I have to remember that this didn't seem to me in the least preposterous, as it was. It only seemed unfit, and I summed up my colossal disabilities quite simply by saying,—

"I don't write a very good hand, sir."

Perhaps a twinkle did come into his eyes. I hope so, I am sure. I hope he had the reward of humor at my young expense.

"Let us see," he said.

He drew forth paper and pen, and asked me to copy an extract from a book. I began to copy, and perhaps he watched me. But I did not think of that as material. I had been caught by the rhythm of what I was reading, and as I wrote on, I forgot him altogether, and wondered where I could lay my hands again on a book like that. It was the "Golden Treasury," and the poem he had given me to copy was one of Herrick's.

"Well, Martin," said he kindly, and I came out of my discoverer's dream and gave him my script.

I had been taught to write by an old system in country school, whereby the writer moves the arm in arcs of circles, and has for pattern the be-all and end-all of ambition, one who can draw with unconsidered strokes a

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bird of paradise, tail and all, as easy as the unproficient can write John. I had set myself this task, but my hands, not in those days obedient to ordered work with so fine a tool as the pen, essayed flights of their own, and it was a sorry chart I handed him. But he looked at it, laid it aside, as no worse than he had expected, and said he thought he could find a use for me. He offered me a cigar, as if to show me we were in the same room of the house of life. But I shook my head. I admired him very much, and perhaps it looked to me as if we were going too fast. He seemed well enough satisfied with that, and as he smoked, told me what money I should have. This left me staring. I didn't know unlicked cubs ever had so much for coming out of a stable and into a room with books of poetry in it. That was all, he said. He would speak to the Tivoli man, and no doubt it could be satisfactorily arranged. He would see me again to-morrow.

II

To-morrow came, and he did speak, to the end that I was given an outfit of new clothes, on account of which I insisted that my money — salary now, not wages — should be docked; and though under what pressure of persuasion I never knew, I was put into a room adjoining that of Mr. Egerton Sims. Then we began our life together, and it came upon me tardily that I was not serving him so much as he was forming

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me. I had fixed hours of study, and there were other hours when we read together. Except when we rode, there was no time that I could see when I actually served him. This I haltingly represented to him, not knowing, as yet, how to meet his air of serene equipment, and he stated briefly that he was in process of making me what he considered valuable. That I accepted with humility, because I could readily see that, raw material as I was, I could not be, at this point, of any value to him. Then I proposed that I should not take money from him until I was capable of earning it, and this also he put aside with a perfect dignity. But it was unearned money, all the same, and with some idea that I might return it to him at a moment when I had learned how to encounter his calm, I saved it with a rigid penury, and watched him, from what was, I am now sure, a great devotion, to fulfil some extraordinary service, since I was so unfitted for the lesser obvious ones, if he should ever ask it of me. But he never did. We were simply, for five years, master and pupil, an older man and the son of his choice.

In that time his bodily state became less and less secure, and for this reason we settled more methodically into the pursuits of the scholar. He knew a little Latin, and that he taught me. It was, his part of it, chiefly like opening a gate into a country he had not fully explored and had little curiosity about. Nor did I care so fervently for the country, though I was conscious of inquisitiveness and wonder. That may have been

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because his own tastes marked me so deeply. But for Greek I did care, as he did. It was our happiness, our rest, our worship. We read the English poets, too, and some history, and he gave me a fair knowledge of Anglicized French. German I taught myself to read, also Italian; but no native would have recognized his tongue, in either case, if I had been so barbarous as to speak it. I am not going to talk about the island, or our pursuits there. It was always alien to me, though so beautiful. There was something in me that quickened under its soft enchantment. I saw not the island of the present day, but all the tropical unknown seas. I was a discoverer, always aglow with wonder. But through it all, in moments of inquietude, I felt the spell of the cold north. When I saw lianas dragging at succulent lush trees, growth fighting for its standing room, sun and moisture in their terrible tyranny dominating the atoms and making them rage toward the consummation of life, sometimes I would find suddenly before my mind's eye the fretwork of bare branches on a New England ridge against the gold of an autumn sun. Certain things I never got used to: the sunrise, the sunset, so swiftly done, without the lingering pageant I had known behind the hilltops from my father's farm, the painted macaws, the strange fruits, bland and cloying to the tongue, the look of the dark passionate skies and the brightness of the stars — all these inspired me with a perennial excited joy, yet a joy that I could never sink into and make really mine. I had

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always the sense that I was there for a little time, a proving perhaps, and that then we might go elsewhere, and I should be able to serve my friend more completely, to return him what he had given me. For always I had the sense of hoarding something for him, as a child enriched with pennies would save them against the day when the dear giver might need even so small a thing.

Since my mother's death I had grown niggard of affection. The circle of it had narrowed to this one man. Women I knew not at all, for he had nothing more than a courteous civility for the shifting crowd at the hotel; and though I might reasonably have shared in any brief connection he made there, I had a strong feeling that I ought every time to say that I had been promoted from the stable. And that was too much trouble, besides being ridiculous and not according with the self-respecting traditions of my birth. I was, too, inordinately shy. It was anguish for me to encounter the womenfolk of my former life below stairs, and, with a fiendish intelligence, they knew it and paid me out to the tune of titters and mock-admiring chaff. One black-eyed jade, a laundress, barred my way once in a passage out of the kitchen when I was taking a short cut to the stable, and vowed I should stay there till I kissed her; and when I would have pushed past her she threw herself upon my shoulder and clung there with feline claws, the while her truly awful cries summoned her ready mates. And they, knowing her game, and being as tickled as

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she, yet affected horror of my liberties with a pretty girl, and when I tossed her against the wall and went my way, they rocked back and forth and cried, I believe, with joy of me. And I must have been a silly, for I was all aflame with anger; and even Egerton Sims saw it an hour after, when I tried to read my Greek.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What is it, Martin?"

If I could have blubbered straight out, it might have done me instant good. I'm sure I felt like it. But I told him, with a stiff lip, that a fool of a girl in the kitchen — There I stopped. It was not worth the pains. But upon this hint that I had in some way been making free with wenches, he looked grave, and set to work to instruct me, so that life should henceforth hold no surprises for me. And though I listened at first with the hot intent of roaring out that he was doing me wrong, and I had not stepped a step toward their hateful blandishments, I presently sank into the awed and humbled quiet of a youth who hears an older man, with some pains to his own habit of reticence, inducting him into the dignity of life. That hour was the crowning one in my love for Egerton Sims. He talked to me about the body, and he talked, though under no such term, about the soul. I was made to see that the tyranny of the one must never threaten the mastery of the other. In the decent man there was no divided house. There were to be no secret and disordered chambers.

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And he gave me to understand that the reward of the undivided house was, if it came to pass, an honorable marriage with a cleanly mate. If it did not come to pass — there he paused, and the sudden startled, tired pallor of his face smote into me the certainty that he had said what he must, in his fastidious duty to me, but that the path had led him into lonesome chambers he did not enter willingly. He rose and left me, and I saw him no more until dinner, when he was his unchanged gentle self.

It was a hot night, and we were sitting on the hotel veranda, a little table before us with cooling drinks. Others were there, too, at little tables. A tourist steamer had come in that day, and the island echoed to the high American voice. I might long for the fretwork of trees against the sky, but not yet did I crave my countryman as he showed himself on his incursions. Such a communication as my friend and master had to make to me might have been more fitly broached in some other scene in the silence of our island home. But he did make it here.

"Martin," he said, "I think we'll go to England."

I felt a sudden lifting of the heart, a sense of great coolness and space, welcome to me in that latitude. I did not answer, but my eyes felt hot. He looked at me, and he must have seen how I felt.

"Why, boy," said he in his kindest voice that was ever kind, "I believe you're glad."

I suddenly recognized not only that I was glad,

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but that I was indeed a boy who had been homesick for a long time. My heat must have been very welcome to him in his own longing, and under the throb of it, as if I had struck out a spark, he told me something in a sudden confidence and sense of the identification of our desires that he might otherwise have meant to keep.

"I might as well say, —" There he paused. I thought it concerned his health, failing, it seemed to me, of late, and I urged him.

"What? What is it, sir?"

"I may as well tell you I am going to England on a business matter. Concerning you."

"Concerning me?" I could only repeat the last two words. What business there might be to concern me in England or indeed the world, I could not guess.

"I have determined," said he, in his stiff, grave way, "to make you, so far as I can, my heir. I shall have to go back to England, to run over certain details and technicalities, really to find out how much I can do."

I was conscious of a crimson heat about my face and in my eyes. All the blood I had had gone into my head and my hands were icy cold. I spoke, and my voice sounded strange to me, even angry.

"You mustn't go back to England, sir."

"Why not?" He had always a manner of speech of the most moving gentleness.

"You can't risk it. That's why you were sent here — for the climate."

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I was telling him what he had previously told me. He answered in rather a tired voice, one I had not heard from him. It seemed to say the play was over, and he was weary and was going home, whether the home were England or another port. And again I was angry, with the unreasoning passion of terror that comes when we see the beloved slipping irrevocably away.

"Don't go, sir," I said. "Don't go."

Whether I meant to England, to brave its chill, or whether I meant to the heaven I thought him wholly fitted for, I did not know. Only I wanted him not to break the crystal of our present life, here in a midstream of being, satisfied with our books and the course of little things.

"It won't make any difference, boy," he said, and I saw I had pleased him by my impetuous outcry. "It's nearly finished."

And I understood he meant his life. He said no more, and I sat with youth's sickening grief upon me, the shadow of things to come. I hardly thought at all of what his generosity held out to me, and really only as it showed his pervasive kindliness. I had known he loved me, known it from day to day in his careful fostering of me, his insistence on my learning every formula relative to life as it is lived; but he might have been constrained to that by his own great sense of duty. This confidence of his made it an affection the more immediate and urgent. I felt

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madly proud, as if he had chosen me to represent his name and the duties of his blood. Presently we said good night, and I got away into the hot dark to think it over, to meet face to face the omnipotence that says, "Thus shall it be." I felt as I had when I saw my mother slipping, and had not been able to snatch her back from the trap where we find ourselves at last. And the night waned, and I was absurdly hungry and thirsty, like a child, with my battlings against Almighty God, and I went home and to bed. But in the morning I found he had died, suddenly it seemed and perhaps without much pain.

III

It was all over very quickly, and no one, not even he was so dead as I. The haste of it stunned me; the impossibility of living for a long time without him left me feeling small and young. A connection of his in an official position at St. Thomas came at once, and my friend was buried. He had given orders that if he died on the island he should be left there, and though his cousin, a man of puffy importance and an exaggeration of the rights of kin, professed to be shocked by the irregularity of this injunction, he fulfilled it with a solemn haste, glad, it seemed to me, to waste no more time over it. Me he seemed to regard with some suspicion as a person unreasonably and capriciously promoted from the company of horseflesh to

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a presuming familiarity with gentlemen's ways. It was as if I had not come by them honestly. At the end, when, with the look of another task well over, he went back to his work, he gave me a nod of dismissal, and I felt in that as in everything that had happened to me since my friend died, a dismissal from the island as well. I had not thought really for an instant of what I was to do; but that same day a boat touched there on its way to New York, and I withdrew my savings from the bank and went on board. Many were kind to me at parting, but to all of them I felt a sort of numbness. I felt as if an arm had been cut off, my right arm, and I was bleeding. It gave me no uplift or sense of youthful wonder to think the roads were opening before me, the roads I had seen in my childish discontents. It was only that my friend was dead, and that I was going elsewhere to be as much like him as I could. On the boat I talked with one and another about the States which I knew as little, except for the New England country, as if I had been born in Trinidad, and from an old-fashioned man and his wife, a lady who belonged to a great many phases of advanced thought, I gathered that the life I intended to pursue could be lived in Boston better than New York. For I wanted to live cheaply, to be a student. This I told them, not having the audacity to assert my further intention of being a writer. A kind of maiden shame was on me about writing and would be, I felt, until I had proved

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myself. I did not know then that it is so intimate a dearness of the heart that one must always keep it rather close, like secret love.

When I saw the bare, bleak shore of my land, I was glad, very glad. I don't hesitate to say that New York scared me and roused in me a very pretty case of homesickness. I was disgustedly sure I was a mollycoddle, and after two days I took the boat for Boston; and there, through the Captain's recommendation, I fell at once into a lodging-house that was trying with all its jolly might to make itself a home. It was on Burke Street, and aunt Cely kept it. This I heard her called three times over by three different persons within half an hour of my arrival. I thought I must say Mrs. Cely, but she smiled the catholic smile of a large woman whose feet are perennially tired and to whom small things have ceased to be of any account, and told me Celia was her given name. Everybody called her by it, and she shouldn't hardly know who they meant if they said Mis' Blackstone. She was of no age because she was so fat and so flushed all over the fine skin of her face that not a mark would hold, and I liked her at once so well that I was glad to say aunt Cely. I don't remember all the people in the house at that time; but Mary Owen was there and Mr. Haley. Mary looked to me a woman quite into middle age; I believe she was thirty-three, but she had worked so hard that the fine bony framework of her face made itself too evi-

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dent under the tawny skin, — the skin a pleasant color, always with freckles on it. She had a fine profile, Mary had, and a large mouth with white teeth. (It was a mercy, she told me once, that they had no crack nor blemish, because a dentist would have been the one last straw.) And she had fine brown hair, a quantity of it, coiled round and round in a way to save time in doing up. It was straight, yet capriciously it had little wisps of curl sometimes near the face when Mary was very hot or the day grew humid. She was rather gaunt, but she had good shoulders and a splendid long stride. Mary was probably what the dressmakers and appraisers would have called a striking looking woman, one that would pay for dressing. But the truth was, she had so little consciousness of herself, such an absolute nullity of interest in frills and things, that, in its foolish imitativeness, the eye passed by her. In this matter of admiration of the sexes, we do chiefly what we are commanded. If a woman flings an audacity over her, we look again. We say she must have something extraordinary to recommend her or she'd never have the gall. I have, in my business of looking on at life, seen plain women who might have been expected to keep a piteous solitude from their lack of commodity; but that instinct of advertising led them to the public eye, they endured your gaze and defied it, and instead of saying, "Poor toad," as Mary would have said, you wondered a little at them and

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thought, "Well, what if, after all!" It's a species of hypnosis.

Mary was eternally busy. She worked in a lawyer's office down town, and all the confusion of her life never moved her ordered calm. Besides that, she was up early when aunt Cely was stalled with rheumatism and some new slavey had proved incompetent, doing up the rooms at that interval while the lodgers were at breakfast. And she had other interests outside, such as I learned later. Mr. Haley I met on the stairs the first day of my stay, a red-haired, paunchy looking person in a plaid waistcoat, and I thought in my innocence, and judging from the fitness of things, that he was probably a bartender. I found out afterward that he did some sort of work for a missionary society down town. Aunt Cely and Mary were talking about him a little later that morning across a brush and dustpan at my door.

"You'll have to marry him," said aunt Cely, as a reasonable proposition.

"Mercy!" said Mary, not aghast, yet as if it were a project she might have to entertain. Mr. Haley's sister had died, she explained to me.

"She was a widow, and he's had to take the baby. If he can't get it brought up in the country — well!"

Her brows crinkled. Poor Mary! I saw at once she had no desire whatever to marry him. But with hypothetical babies wailing for her she might have to.

Manners in the lodging-house were of the easiest

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and kindest. It was a natural custom of the evening for me to stop at the open door of Mary's little room if I went past while she sat there desperately putting on dress braids and things; and once she offered to take a stitch in the frayed end of my cravat. I let her with the unformulated ease and gratitude men accord to women who offer no challenge to the eye. What Mary would have been with consciousness of any sort — either of her sex or the possibilities of her healthy nature — I do not know. She had absolutely none. She kept a fine shyness of her own, too. Life, so far as she seemed to see it, might have been a hand to mouth existence on an island, where everybody's absorbing duty lay in services of one wrecked mariner for another. She was lifting all the time, carrying starved kittens to their lawful refuge, conducting the old and the blind across the street — I believe she went shopping with an unknown grandame one day and lost the borrowed hour for getting her own new hat — and this with no priggishness or official philanthropy. She was always looking about with her clear, rather frowning, puzzled gaze, to see what manner of world it might be and, not liking it very well, trying honestly and wistfully to wash it a little cleaner, iron it out, and shine it up a trifle here and there. One effect she had. She made me feel at home, and without doing anything about it. I found the world much warmer because she was near. She asked me frankly what I did, because it was the

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custom of the people she knew to do something, do it desperately, indeed: for if they did it in any desultory fashion they were likely to have their time on their hands. I told her as unreservedly and with no sense that it was unusual, that I had saved a little money and I meant to live on that until it was gone, and then I should go to work. Mary drew her brows together and looked serious. I seemed to her an idle apprentice, and she asked me directly whether I was run down or whether that was because I had got the ways of warm climates, and why I didn't go to work at once. I explained that I didn't know anything. So I was going to study until I did.

"You could go on a paper," said Mary, her clear gaze on me, all the sibylline lore of the mother in her eyes. "You don't have to know anything for that." Then she seemed to think a minute — we were in the lower hall, separated by the frightful elaboration of the newel-post, the smell of the backstairs oil-cloth in our nostrils. "I think," said Mary, as if she were called upon to prescribe for me, "you'd better get acquainted with Mr. Blake."

Who was he?

"He has the back attic," she explained. "He's very learned. He writes poetry."

I had no drawing toward inchoate young men no more of a student than I meant to be, if it came to that, with uncrowned verse upon their knees. So I was beginning to go up the stairs to escape her kindness even if I must

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evade her in the doing, and at that moment the front door behind us opened, propelled by a man who couldn't get his key out because he was so in a hurry, and John Blake himself came in. He was tall, strong enough, capable of being athletically developed if he gave his mind to it, black-eyed — eyes so velvet soft I had never seen — a great rugged forehead and a nose that might have allowed him to be anything at the top of the scale.

"That's a statesman's nose," I should have said if I'd caught it in the open.

But the mouth — with its scrubby line of black above — there were the emotions in John Blake's mouth, clean ones, all of them, and some so exquisite they'd need the intimate delicacies of verse to tell about them. Mary turned to him at the opening of the door, and his face flashed all over at the sight of her — red fire in the eyes, curves in the mouth, and the least little delicate uplift of the brows in a pleased interrogation. That, as I noted it, seemed to indicate that he liked Mary very much. And so he did; but his nature was a responsive one, swiftly played upon. He often seemed to be answering when his nerves were only saying, "I hear." And the things they heard were far away from us who made the circuit for him. He couldn't share them with us. We didn't even, most of the time, get an echo. That was why, though you might adore Blake, you were so eternally lonesome with him. I had really halted, staring at the splendid vision of him,

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and before I turned, Mary had me by the name and was introducing us. His face darkened in civility. "What the devil — " it seemed to say.. "Who's this?" But when Mary pelted out that I was a young man just come from a warm place — as if it had been the fabled destination of sinners — and that I was going to study and write books — she made it poetry — he gave me a smile a cut below Mary's, but still very sweet and full of curves.

"Come up to my room," said he to me. "Let's talk it over."

Mary turned away content, possibly to go down the oil-clothed stairs to the basement and make something cleaner, and Blake and I mounted to his attic room with one window approached by a tiny platform and giving a view of the sunset sky and the Charles. It was a meagre, hideous room in all the lines of its furnishings, yet faded through age to a uniform and according dulness that was not unpleasant. And it was very clean. I found out afterward that he raged and stormed if he was not given his share of hot water and soap. You might starve him, but he must find the world scrubbed. The dignity of the room — for it had dignity — lay in the lavishness of books, piled on a great square table under the light of the party wall, books in ordered heaps all round the floor. Blake threw off his coat and hat — I had flung my hat into my room in passing — pointed out two shabby old chairs by the grate, evidently his own, and poked

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about among the papers on the table, his long supple fingers threading in and out.

"A fellow left a cigar here the other day," he said, as if in an interested quest which absorbed him more than the value of what he might find by it. "It seemed to me rather a good one. Ah!"

He had come on it. He held it out to me with a fascinating smile of eager generosity. I hesitated.

"Don't you smoke?" I asked. There seemed not to be two cigars.

"No." He looked rueful, like a child ashamed. "It acts like the devil on me, just like tea and coffee. I can't have any vices. I've been addicted to bread and water. They've undone me."

I took the cigar and held it, took the match he gave me, for I knew after that first minute he wouldn't know whether I smoked or not. His mind, having concerned itself with the anxious cares of the conventionally polite, would settle down with a long breath to its abiding interests. The cigar would find its way back to the table, and the next visitor would see it innocently introduced to him as a rather good one a fellow left there. Blake sat down at ease, as if the only troublesome thing connected with my visit were well over in his having essayed the proffer of a customary joy. Now he looked approximately happy. His forehead smoothed out. His eyes took on the calm of the man who feels himself at home in a spot that has long offered him the serenity of ordered pursuits.

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"What sort of things are you doing?" he caught himself back to ask me. His mind had been stretching away, I know now, to the great names he was always marching with.

"Nothing," said I.

He nodded, as if in an easy comprehension.

"Fallow time? One of those infernal spells when you think you never'll write another stroke and sweat and groan and curse yourself? It'll pass. It always does. Read some poetry. That's what brings the fever on."

I felt most deplorably lacking in all he might expect of me.

"I don't write," I said. "I've never written at all."

He stared at me.

"Mary said you did."

"I told her I wanted to."

Here was a drop from the high land of desert. I was no better than the lads and misses dancing out of universities to dip their pens and plunge. The interest not only faded out of his face but ebbed suddenly, leaving it as flat as such a nobly proportioned harmony of features could well be. His only wish, I could see, was to get me out of the room. Suddenly I was as fiercely determined not to go. There was treasure for me in that room, coaxing possibilities, the problem of his hidden mind, the books, the sealed silences of it all. Desperate, I opened my lips and spoke. I talked about the only thing I knew — Trinidad and

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the tropics. He got interested, not in me but in the world of life and growth. I bade him remember what an island was to the great Elizabethans when they dreamed of them and beheld the ocular proof of their rich fantasy of leaves. He took fire and quoted Shakspeare and the "still vex'd Bermoothes." Not a question did he ask me about the prospects of commerce as it concerned the United States, nor whether the importation of sugar would affect our sales. No: but he knew of the great silk cotton tree, he was avid of news about the flashing of colors on the heads of macaws; and were the humming-birds extinct? He knew the tropical jungle, that, breathing air and sun, reared itself and flung arms and trailed ropes of gorgeous potency. He had heard of the swamps where mandrakes stand with their bare leafless legs in water and multiply and make their impenetrable barrier. And he had a theory I knew I could not shake him in, that the stars of the tropics are not to be mentioned with ours, flaming, golden worlds. Indeed they are different, but not in the degree his poetic mind had pictured. I believe he would not have been surprised if I had told him I had seen the palpitant birth of a new star, the atoms rushing together out of the Milky Way and the round orb hurled on its ordered course. Nothing surprised John Blake, nothing splendid and audacious. But I snatched at the first pause, and asked him about his poetry. What had he done? He gloomed a little, and I saw his achievement only mocked at his amazing

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dreams. He took up a thin gray volume and handed it to me. These were small perfect lyrics, with nothing of his colossal thirsts and imaginations in them. That I could see at one race over the pages. But the mention of it had led him into another path, one dangerous to me. For now he began to put me through my examination. It was all unconsciously done, just as he would have sounded me on any topic where we had kindred tastes. The seventeenth century was his playground. He had lived there until its lyrics were at his tongue's end, the dates of birth and death indubitable, and the obscurest question fitted with his ripe theory. Did I think this or that? Poor lout, I thought nothing at all. There was not for me, there never had been, any cult of literature as a sacred thing. I began to see I had looked on it as the mirror to life, the medium; but after all, life was the bigger thing. All the mountains and lakes, all the "cloud-capp'd towers" of the whole earth, even the symphonies and poems might be swept away, but life, warm life would last, pulsating behind the veil, and clothing itself in new forms, by sheer vibration. This I could not tell him. I only felt a hurt resentment when I saw him marking me down lower and lower. It was in a way, a funny way, as if a Boston man met you in the face of the Jungfrau and asked you anxiously if you had known the Thises and Thats before he could exchange the platitudes of awe. John Blake, the living breathing machine dedicated to immortal things, was more to

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me than the seventeenth century with the beautiful dried leaves of fantasy it had left. He was life, and they were only immortality. But I was made that way. He was made to adore the written word. I was set in the midst of the pageant of life, and I adored that, or rather I looked upon it with wonder and felt the littleness and the greatness of the atom that made a part of it. I was the atom. Once he referred to men of leisure "like you," and I got hot over it.

"I'm not a man of leisure," I said. "I've just three hundred dollars left, and what I've had I've been years saving up. But I've got to get to work and do it within a year."

When he found I was humble and not cocky, and that I meant to pitch in and grind, he fanned up a waning respect for me. And I was gleeful to an ungodly extent to find he had no Greek. But I told him humbly I was going to the Public Library to study the seventeenth century, and then he was mild with me, and told me I couldn't do better, but that I mustn't do it unless it called to me. Every man must take his own line. Then the talk had one of those drops that come from having lived too long, and nothing would rescue it. Blake frankly yawned, and I took my leave in a let-down state of mind he would have deplored if he had known it. He was one of the kindest hearts. But he frankly had no more interest in me as a possible dweller in the chambers where he was most at home. I learned afterward — not from his speech, for I

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think he never recognized this, but from watching him — with how eager a desire he put out antennæ to discovery, delicately testing to see who knew more about poetry than he did and ready to call out Hail! He was a born hero-worshipper, and generous of praise. But I simply had not won my spurs, and never should, he must have seen: for the questions of literary casuistry he propounded were dull to me, the dry shards of delicate achievement. I went away galled, sure he would never want to see me again. But he called down the stairs to me: —

"I think you'd better let me take you round to the Toasted Cheese. To-morrow night."

I could go at any time. I had no engagement anywhere save with the seventeenth century.

"Is it a play?" I asked.

"No," said Blake. "It's a club."

IV

On the way to the Toasted Cheese — not far, a basement in that same neighborhood — I learned that Blake himself was a journalist "of sorts." He spoke of it as one might own to driving a cab by day, to the end of keeping his nights for divine pleasures. At present he was on a weekly paper intended strictly for the middle class of wits, the folk also who like to be in the swim of what passes for thought and, having no thinking apparatus, take their cramming in pillules.

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It was really a *hortus siccus*, the pressed flowers of literature and comment. Blake said it might have been called the *Borrowed Plume* because it never paid for anything but collating. Or you could call it the *Mother Dove*, or the *Maternal Pigeon*, because it selected and moulded and worked over and imitated, with a mechanical deftness, preparing nourishment for squabs. As we went along, he found more names for it, and seemed to vent a good-natured spite against it. It was the *Masticator*, the *Pigeon Crammer*, the *Squabs' Delight*, or what pleased him best, the *Bally Thief*. His own part in it was quite simple and easy to perform. He chewed over science and presented it in doses suited to the reading clubs of Lower Centreville. He selected verse of a type calculated to send a large proportion of any population into luxurious tears over the Baby's Shoe, The Convict's Child, or Mother's Gingham Gown. All this drudgery Blake viewed with a colossal scorn, and yet he did it, as taking less time than a salaried position of more honor, and talked about it in a mood of light-running irony, as if he didn't object so very much on the whole, and might even be tossing his hat up while he worked. I have seen a devout Christian reading his guide-book in a church of another kidney while the misguided carried on their service, and this in no discourtesy, since he had the monopoly of the ecclesiastical deity whom they worshipped amiss. God wasn't attending to them, and with that vast precedent why should he? So it was with Blake. He

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didn't even see the little gods he was striding over to the stubble where he earned his necessary bread. The high gods of poesy were his, all gold and ivory, cloud and fire. He might even have consented to run little pewter images in moulds to please the children of a meagre age.

In the midst of his drollery, we came to the Toasted Cheese, in a shabby house with windows all unwashed. These rooms they might be able to keep longer than common, said Blake, being in the basement: unless, indeed, sound had a trick of mounting. They couldn't afford second floors or thirds, and wherever they'd had attic rooms they were hastily asked to leave, because lodgers didn't like to be kept awake. They had been turned out of house after house, but that didn't really matter because the club had no furnishing beyond a few tables and chairs, and each member carried his own mug. These rooms had their separate entrance, and Blake threw open the door on a crowd of fellows all talking competitively. They were young men. I found afterward that most of them prided themselves on giving cause to newspaper paragraphs: *Les jeunes* were doing so and so, *les jeunes* being really the Toasted Cheese. Blake took me at once to a short, thick-set fellow by himself at a table in the corner, an Irishman, Johnnie McCann, with upstanding light hair and a humorous mouth, but eyes perpetually roaming and blinking and ready to go crazy over the thoughts behind them. He made me hos-

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pitably welcome, though in an absent-minded way, as if his musings were of more value to him than any stimulus outside, but began to talk at once to Blake. He used untainted English though with the slightest possible Gaelic twist.

"I was up till four last night," said he.

Blake was ordering me some beer.

"Any luck?" he asked, as if he understood what hunt it was.

"Three songs," said McCann. "One, Ireland in Chains, one on the lines of the Dark Rosaleen, the other no good. When the clock struck four, I got up and went to the window, and if I had been over any decent hole in the world and not a back alley, I would have thrown myself out."

Blake nodded gravely, then shook his head. He had a glass of beer by him, but I noticed he didn't drink. He had an invincible repugnance to deluging or cramming himself when he was neither hungry nor athirst.

"I don't think much of the prowess of the stomach," I once heard him say.

"Can't do that, Johnnie," said he now. "Look out for yourself."

"Why can't I do it?" urged McCann contradictiously. He had all the air of entering upon an argument old to him and Blake. Now he explained to me. "It's my mania of self-destruction. The boys see me through it when they're round, but there'll come a time when they won't — they won't."

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He fell into gloomy musing and began drawing circles with his finger from a little lake of beer on the table.

Blake had been called away to one of the other tables, and McCann, under some sense of the claims of a newcomer, roused himself and turned to me. He had a shiny smile.

"Yes, the boys take turns seeing me through it," he confided to me. "Sometimes a fit doesn't come on for six months. One or other's detailed to see me through. That's according as they're at liberty. I don't thank 'em for it. They're all right, though," said he, warming. "You bet they're all right."

Then there was a petition for a song from McCann, and I wondered whether it had been judged best to quiet his nerves by melody. He yielded instantly, and began Vilikins, in a beautiful tenor, and the boys came in stormily on "Toorul-lul-loorul-lul-loorul-lullay." When I had caught it and could come in too I felt more grown up than I had since Egerton Sims began to treat me like an equal and a gentleman. Blake asked me some questions across the table about Trinidad, and I knew he thought it was the only thing I could talk about. Indeed it was, but I went about it rather sulkily, because I wanted, in that atmosphere, to be "sporty" and literary, and even to disclose a suicidal mania if that would recommend me. Suddenly, when they had allowed me to act the part of the honored guest for ten minutes or so, little Jake

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Rand accosted me. He was an atomy of a man with a perfect genius for imitation: he could imitate anything from your own face when you heard the bank had failed or Chloris was waiting for you down by the brook, to the styles of all the classic and living writers. He leaned across the table and said to me in his impudent voice you never could resent because it came from an atomy:—

"Say, Redfield, how did you grow up so damned old-fashioned?"

There was an instant's pause. I felt my face scorching, but there came a little chorus of chuckles as if everybody saw how pat it was. And nobody ever resented anything in the Toasted Cheese. I had learned that already. They tried to be men with all their swagger and armor of off-hand good humor, though they were by election *jeunes*. But it was not temper I felt. He had suddenly thrown me back five years, and I felt the breath of the Tropics and heard the voice of my old friend. I found my own voice and lost my shyness.

"I'll tell you," said I. "I'll tell you all. I was a stable boy down in Trinidad. A man fifty years old took me out of the stable and taught me all he knew — all but his magnificent manners and the things he couldn't teach me because they were his and I wasn't big enough to reach 'em. He taught me all I know, and I suppose I've imitated him till maybe I seem like a man of fifty. Well, if that's why, I'm glad I

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do." I got up with the hot haste of the young and lifted my borrowed mug. "I drink," said I, thinking of the cavalier he had been, "to Egerton Sims."

There was something in it that caught them.

"Good for you," they were yelling, perhaps also because they liked to yell and seized a pretext.

"Good boy!" said McCann, coming out of his muse over his drink. And we each put a foot on the table and drank to Egerton Sims: and Tommy Johnson, who was writing plays full of blood and silk and swords and glove strokes in the face, in an ecstasy of seeing the times he loved come so awake, threw his mug behind him, and the glass bottom broke, and he picked it up and stuck his small hand through it, and cut himself, and we passed from our emotion to instant delight and hailed him martyr.

And so was Egerton Sims, the gentleman, away somewhere in his pilgrimage among greater folk than we, toasted in our bare New England.

V

I DIDN'T get over being a little old-fashioned. I could play with the rest of them, but I had always a slight stiffness of demeanor, a copy of my friend's large and noble way of taking things. I didn't know this from any sifting of myself, but I did see it from time to time in my effect on other people. And it troubled me. I would rather have been Johnnie

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McCann, ready with his ballad to sing or a chord to strike on any instrument, even if I found myself saddled also with a suicidal mania. I thought I could have managed that and cast it from me. But then I had an impregnable physical health, and until that is shaken, we always think we could still the tremors of our blood, its erring current. I had a good deal of time here and there with Blake. He seemed to think me a decent fellow, though I still knew nothing about the seventeenth century, and Mary brought us together. She was our friend, the friend of all among us. She seemed to know the aggregate members of the Toasted Cheese, one man passing along the fame of her to another, and I thought they all regarded her as I did, as an excellent fellow who might as well have been a boy.

But one day Jake Rand came into the Toasted Cheese really tight because an inconsiderable man at a removal of three from a manager had thought he could get one of his serious plays read. Jakie could write as fast as he could run, for high schools and girls' sewing clubs, and really got paid rather well, because his farces accumulated so; but what he really wanted to do was to bring folk out of Gibbon, and Miss Strickland, and make them spout and die. He used to go around with big tomes of popular history under his arm, and we sang an adaptation of "the devil clapped his paw on the little tailor," to "his Gibbon under his arm," with a rising swell of voices

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and a brave *da capo*. He used to drop down on benches in the Common to read, when the weather would admit it, and old ladies would take him for a rising young student, and search into the causes of his pallor, and Jakie would tell them flaming stories of the wearing result of literature on a little oatmeal. But this day when he was tight on hope and unaccustomed mixtures, he took me by the arm and inquired with gravity, —

"Say, when you goin' to propose to Mary?"

Perhaps I looked immovable. I suppose I tried to, for that was the way Egerton Sims would have met like impudence, and he was the solvent always in my mind. Jake insisted upon it out of his drunken fervor. If I hadn't proposed to Mary I must go and do it at once. Then when I was betraying my disgust of him, Johnnie McCann came up and frowned him off, implying meanwhile to me that I mustn't "get mad." There was no offense in it, no offense in the world.

"Besides, it's a fact," said he, "we all propose to Mary. If you haven't been rejected by Mary, there's one more thing you've got to go through, that's all."

It struck me that there was truth in it. They weren't making light of Mary. They actually did propose to her. It had become a necessity or a fashion. I suddenly saw Mary in the light of a spouse very capable, eternally getting other fellows in to bind up their wounds or cook messes for them or tell them she'd sit up at night and copy that article and be paid

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when it was accepted. The article so born seldom was accepted. Mary in that aspect, the only one I knew her in, looked very attractive to me in a general way, though not at all conducive to any immediate personal passion.

"Mary rejected you?" I said, trying in my heavy style to keep up the jest.

"Had to," said Johnnie, "because we've all asked her. All but Blake. He's the only one that—" Here he stopped, constrained, I saw, by decency, and I could not but think he meant, the only one with any chance. And immediately I felt the searching pang of sudden jealousy, put on my hat and went home to see Mary. She was not there. I knew she wouldn't be at that hour of the afternoon, but my instinct had been to get at once on her track. By the time she did come, rather wistful because she was so tired, but really happy in that she carried a bandbox and was so fain of it she had to open it in the hall and show me her fruit plucked from the tree of life, she looked her old dear commonplace self to me, not at all a Mary to burn the topless towers of anything for; but all the same I was still hot with jealousy. The raging male was all awake in me, sworn to have her lest another should. At that moment I would have fought every other son of the pack and desired her — until I forgot they wanted her.

"See my hat," said Mary.

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It was a modest brown thing exactly right for a serviceable Mary, turning down to shade the eyes and trimmed with a soft ribbon that wouldn't muss except under the greatest provocation, or feel the rain. Under the practical brim her kind eyes looked at me a little anxiously.

"Am I," they might have said, "is it possible I could be a little prettier than I think I am?"

"Mary," said I, "will you marry me?"

The dear maidenly look died out of her eyes, and she took off the hat.

"The idea!" said Mary. "Those boys have been putting it into your head."

"Nobody has put it into my head," said I, in the wild and glorious bombast of my mood. "Mary, you've got to have me. I shan't let you alone till you say yes."

"Oh, yes, you will," said Mary, rather wearily. She was laying the baby hat back in its box with a tenderness that indicated she had an unchanged consideration for it, though none for me. "Have you seen Mr. Blake? He's got a job for you on his paper."

"Don't talk to me about Blake," said I. "I've no use for him."

Every minute I was growing more infantile and yet more consistent in my part.

"No use for Mr. Blake? Yes, you have, too," said Mary. "Don't be a silly."

But her face went all over a deep miserable red,

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the hue that hurts because the blood that hangs out that flag knows how to tell the brain its secret is abroad. I ceased my stare at her and ran up to my room, hurling back over my shoulder, — "I never shall give it up."

In my room I stood at the window, hands in my pockets, and glowered. If there had been a pack of other male creatures so much as desiring to desire Mary, and I had had them out there in the dusty street where the boys were beginning marbles, the carnival of spring, I knew I should have challenged them all, head down, bellow war-defying, and we should have locked horns and I should have been the conqueror. I felt very shaggy and savage and altogether invincible. I didn't really stop to think at all how Mary looked to me; but I was fighting for her and I liked it.

At that moment, when I was liking it most, John Blake appeared in my doorway, and I turned upon him with a dramatic roughness I considered rather well done. But when I saw how tired he looked, ashen, indeed, with that almost exultant spark he always had in his eyes when he had been hammering at his verse, the fool died out of me and I felt my temperature running down to its normal degree of very serious respect. It was no use our pretending, any of us, that Blake wasn't as far as floating clouds above us, and that we didn't regard him with an unbounded fealty. There were days when we knew perfectly well he wasn't coming near us, and if we

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met him we needn't speak; but those were his apocalyptic raptures. He withdrew, we felt, into a high mountain, and there the burning precepts of art and beauty were delivered to him. But on the days when he was slashing his verse, already in the rough, and welding and fitting it to deeper harmonies, we might speak to him. We knew he was still at one with us.

"Do you want a job?" asked Blake.

Only that morning I had realized that my little capital was dwindling like the mischief. I had been looking into the jaws of a world singularly unresponsive in the matter of bed and food.

"They've started another fool column on the paper," said he.

"Your paper? The *Bally Thief?*"

He passed a hand over his tired face and seemed to wipe from it the remembrance and the stress of the beautiful things he might be doing save for these mandates of the tiresome day.

"It's book reviews and a letter from New York. Do you want it?"

"I don't want to go to New York," I paltered. My homely corner began to look very cosy to me, on account, I thought, in my new-found pose, of Mary.

"You needn't go to New York. They wouldn't know what to do with stuff written on the spot. Keep track of the New York papers and fake the rest.

"But is it —" I blurted out, "do you think that's square?"

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He hardly looked at me. Trumpets were calling him or small sweet pipes to far dim isles of harmony. The time given to the crude tasks of life was all waste hours to Blake. He would be forever in seclusion learning how they sang, if he might, they who sang the songs he loved. He took no particular notice of my question except, perhaps, if I might put it so, the outside of it. Blake would have slain the man who dared to alter a line of Shelley. I have heard some of his remarks on gentlemen who ventured to do it, and if he had written them down, they must have scorched the page. He would have sat up all night and many a night fussing over the interpolation of a comma in Keats. But the ways of earning bread by manipulating dull things, in order that a man might live to write big verse, these he regarded drearily indeed, but as not even touching the outmost aura of the globe of life. What must be, must, that a man of gifts might eat bread enough to keep up to the mark of perceptive rhythm.

"I don't know," said he. "You'll have to settle that for yourself. You can go round to the office if you want to know any more."

I did go round within an hour, saw Wadham, the frog-like editor and publisher in one skin, he of the light blue eyes and stiff hair upstanding and the aggressive spectacles. All of us knew Wadham. He was disgustingly rich from the instinct he had of picking up the crumbs and cigar ends and using them thriftily. He

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could never have edited a big magazine, but he was the very devil of cleverness for stealing and rehashing other men's editing. At once on hearing of the place, I had a passion for work, and not even he could quench it in me. I looked upon him, perhaps by the hypnosis of my admiration for Blake, as the dull ass that was to carry me over the stream. We talked, and for some obscure reason he seemed to regard me as a find. Perhaps Blake had said artfully hopeful things of me, the more roseate in that his mind was jumping away from the commonplace to the gardens he was always growing. Wadham set before me the assurance of a good weekly sum, and I ran home tickled as a child to play with my new, scarcely worthy, toy, and prove myself. Something was bitter in me, some gall of discontent, because I knew well enough the fellows did not prize me save as the chum of an idle hour. I had simply done nothing, nor did I in my shyness talk about doing things, and I had no special line of arrogance. It was not necessary to have distinguished yourself, in the Toasted Cheese. You might even swear yourself blue with the desire to distinguish yourself. And my high resolves on a stiff course of reading had borne no bud. I did read, I did cram. But the pageant of the day was more to me than the smell of age and ink. I tried to beat Blake at his own game, or to run neck and neck with him. Why shouldn't I worship and suck at the seventeenth century? Why shouldn't I be conversant with the nicer points of criticism? But it was

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of no use. My heart wasn't in it. The scholar's meticulous pains but irritated me. I didn't care whether Keats was born within a twelvemonth of the hour Blake defended. To have stood on the precise spot where Dr. Johnson shed his filial tears would not have moved me. But the old dog's personality did, and Keats's verse, so that I sat up at night raging because I couldn't do such divine stuff, or, indeed, any stuff at all. And I liked to walk, to pelt through a snowstorm with Mary and love her all the more — I really loved her in a warm way if I didn't feel I had to rush her off from the boys — when the snow feathers got in her neck and tickled her. A robust growth of the boyhood I never had came back to me in the company of Mary and the Toasted Cheese, and I got boisterously wild on Christmas Eve when we ran after the Waits and put our pagan noses into a church long enough to smell the evergreen. Life had me by the hair, the throat even; it was a chance whether life did not yet lay me by the heels. And all the time Blake, like an engine of incalculable power, was going on, beat, beat, doing his abhorred task and spilling his life blood over the enchanted page. Sometimes I saw the verse he was writing. He had no shame or shyness, as he had no conceit. These lines he was plucking out of the air, out of the infinite intention, he tremulously hoped. Once on his table in the gnarled small script of his hand, they were open to us all, as much our property as his. Sometimes I thought he regarded them with an inno-

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cent wonder. They seemed to him so dear, so exquisite, so small, like indestructible snow-wreaths that had somehow taken their whirling orbit to his paper, that I believe he, in his humility and lack of self-appraisement, only wondered why they should have come that way, and if he should lose them in the warm air of praise. And about this time it was that uncle Hardy died, and I went down to the funeral and found the widow and her son, he half my age, land poor and deep in debt. So I sold my sad old farm, crying out to me from every windy corner to come back and talk things over, for a neat but inadequate sum of ready money, and this I turned in toward uncle Hardy's debts. It might have been more if I had waited stolidly and made a better trade. But that is like me, — ever in the haste that is its own undoing. They looked wan and "wee" to me, those two, as I had felt when my father and mother went the same quick gait; and besides I was in a cowardly haste to get away from the appealing face of meadow, road, and brook, and, at the same time, to leave the mourners not uncomforted.

VI

I DID my task on the *Bally Thief*, trippingly at first, in the way we have of adventuring a new thing, and then as the necessary concomitant to getting my money. I do not like to remember how long a time I did it, and this, I note, is the first trace of cowardice in my con-

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fession. For though I used those years in warm and innocent living, it looks to me now as if I ate them up in waste, as the spring is wasted if the farmer gathers but does not sow. I was enchanted — the worn word of Johnnie — with living, and highly indulgent of my normal tastes in it. I ought to have bound myself to the printed page, studied languages, forced open gates that lead to the world's high offices. This, if I was to find myself ever in command. But I read only the books I liked, chiefly poetry which I grew to know by heart, and turned away with a deft persistency from mental discipline. I wrote verse, too, when my blood moved too fast for prose, insensate stuff, and burned it when my saner mood came back. Anything did for a starter: a tramp through the snow, the taste of frozen apples on the tree, the tingling of the stars, Orion's glorious regnancy. My verse, I suspected even then, was the flower of a perfect physical health that went to my head and had to "out" at my finger tips, since I couldn't be forever tramping.

Time stood still with us. Blake withdrew a little more persistently to his attic, and it smelled the more of books. The Toasted Cheese changed its quarters two or three times, but the boys kept their status of vociferous ambition and bald accomplishment. We felt the kick of our legs, and we were young. There was time to burn. Mary, I sometimes thought, looked thinner. I see now she had begun to show the premature brutality of time. And that was as it had

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to be: for she was the only one of us who loved and suffered.

One spring came and found us all as ready as ever for our little games, our small excursions into the green to come back with waving boughs for Mary and aunt Cely — this on the days when Mary had extra copying and could not go. Sometimes Mr. Haley wanted to go, but we never allowed it after the one murderous moment in his adopted kiddy's infancy when he stood at Blake's elbow all through a slow-moving and apocalyptic sunset and told us how well the baby was getting on, and how you couldn't believe but these artificial foods were more or less dope until you'd tried them. We all had a chivalry about protecting Blake and his perennial conception and memorizing, we hoped, of new-born verse, and no "bloomin' he-incubator" as Johnnie called Haley was allowed to approach him after that. Blake didn't really mind. He hadn't heard it, nor did he hear most of us anyway: but it hurt us to see him instigated to mind.

Then one afternoon Jake Rand went down to Romney and came back with a proposal that set us all stark crazy. It was long, broad country, with a few decent hills, he said, a great deal of space everywhere because you could see it all. Jakie was Cockney, and his descriptions of nature were seldom lucid. She wouldn't have known her face after he'd done with her, any more than some of you would under the veil of Blake's impressionism, he who saw her as the child of God.

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But the point of Jake's discovery was that there was an old yet tight and praiseworthy barn down there, once used by a colony of young musicians, when a master he knew had taken his way thither, pupils in his train. The master taught no more now. He had gone abroad and the pupils were scattered, but the barn remained and all its cubicles where, with a pallet of husks and a washstand, we could ead the one life and gluttonize on air. There was a prime boarding-house, the Apple Tree, not half a mile away, and there we could get our food. We gasped and accepted it. The simplicity of the proposition indicated an imperative beckoning finger. We at once realized how cramped and stultified we were in Burke Street, and how the walls of the barn opened out into a heaven of lethargy. Only Mary could not go It was she who made that discovery, not we, who, on the threshold of our pilgrimage, hailed her the queen of it.

"Why, I can't go down there with you boys," said Mary, when we made it evident, in our uncouth and varying fashions, that she was absolutely one of us and this summer business included her. "I've got a novel to copy. It'll take me a month."

That it would take her flying fingers the half of that wasn't true, and so we accepted the reason behind and groaned over it, and she tried to comfort us by saying we could bring her up a fresh egg now and then, or a clod of turf.

All this time I had been doing my task, the more

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bunglingly, because Wadham was dissatisfied. He wanted a lighter touch, more "go," a variety of facets that I didn't cut upon my work because, plainly, I didn't know how. I didn't suit his public. But then there was Blake who was never chidden. How could he suit it, he who set aside his vast apprehension of worlds and forgot cryptic phrases to collate the bald and thuddy things philistia took with gravity?

"Oh, well!" said he. He began to consider the stuff he pieced together, to consider it really for the first time, perhaps, since he undertook it, and this only to drag me out of my bog. Blake was very accessible to humans when they were yelling loud enough to catch his ear. It had to be a literary difficulty, though, to haul him actually back from the dead centuries, nothing less. If you were hungry or cold, he would empty his pockets for you and walk on. But the written word commanded him. "You know you mustn't think of it. If you do, you can't do it at all. Get a photographic idea of what Wadham wants, hang it up in your workroom, and set your brain going by it. You can do it and let your mind off, can't you? See how a man uses a pickaxe — the man in the street, not the man after gold. He isn't thinking of the pickaxe. He's conscious of Mary Ann somewhere, or wondering if his dinner pail's got pie in it."

"But what's the matter with the stuff?" said I.

He dragged a copy of the *Bally Thief* out of my pocket and began to read it seriously. I could see he

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had never compassed a word of mine before. This was meagre, being in the *Thief*, but it was mine, and the neglect pricked me. I thought he might have done it because it was mine, to test my mettle and smell out the good in me. He chucked the paper back into my pocket.

"Why," said he, "it's old-fashioned."

There it was again, the stigma coming out red all over me.

"Wadham wants a lighter touch," I said weakly.

"Oh, he! of course he does. He wants something mother can lay on the kitchen table and read without difficulty while she chops the hash. Tell him to shut up. He'll like you the better for it. But you are old-fashioned. There's no doubt of it." There it was for the third time. "You could write perorations. You know how they used to go booming along. Not all of them. Once or twice they soared. I bet you might soar a little, too."

I took all the comfort I could out of this pinched encomium, though I didn't see how I could ever soar. I was shy before the flamboyant, the word that doesn't fit our every day, as a suburban Odd Fellow shudders when he goes, pompous and strutting, down the street to join the procession, yet knowing the stare of all the wives, the very moral of his own wife, satirical jades, is upon his feather and the gimcrackery he has set out to play in. The fear of slipping over the boundary of life as it is on this present earth was ever quieting me.

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If I began to write and a showy and accepted theatricality tried, at Wadham's call, to clamber into it, I had to stop. My pen got mawkish and wouldn't work. I felt myself a fool. Life, I knew, was an immensity of tragedy, but not so obvious, so clean cut round the edges as Wadham and his following would have me think. It went stalking on, hurling out retribution in the face of sin — which was only an imperfect understanding of rules — and in the long, long run correcting sin, but this only by heavenly inconsistencies. And since it was all a matter of a man's own deserts and the deserts of his father and his grandfather and the blood-red burden they bequeathed to him, how was I going to write neat little dramas suited to the apprehension of Wadham's circulation and his wives with their minds on bargain day and the lore of clothes? Yet I made no mistake of finding myself too big for the job. I was well aware that minds existed so sworn to simplicity, to the sympathetic kindliness of knowing what other folk feel that they could even satisfy Wadham, though in a key Wadham himself had never dreamt of playing in. No, I wasn't too big for it. I was simply too stiff, too loutish and untrained to catch the step of life.

One morning in my russet mood over this and my lack of "go," I wandered down to the North End, and there at a corner I came on an Italian lad, all black eyes and shining hair and sewer mud from his work, saying good-by, in melting intonations and musical vowels, to a girl. Over that one man played the in-

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herited emotional genius of a nation that no sooner feels than it expresses, and indeed, under the necessity of expression, embraces the histrionic moment with ardor, give it ever so fleeting a cause. This, I saw, was no parting of the hour. Some fate, some grim sibyl, had stepped between these two and, with great outspreading palms, was thrusting them apart. It might have been a sibyl, or it might have been a sordid taskmistress, the inexorable mandate from the lips of the world that bids us eat and see to it that we provide enough. The boy might have had his little money stolen by some bunco banker of his own blood. The girl might know her natural guardians were waiting to shuffle her hand into a dry weazened one that yet could play the game of chinking coin. I turned away from them — indeed, I had turned away instantly, having no business in their solemn fane of parting, — went home and wrote it down, their story, in a patois of illiterate English tailed by the vowel *a*. This, though having no special belief in it, I carried in to Wadham the next morning, and he loved it.

"Do me a dozen, Redfield, do me a dozen," he wheezed, his blue eyes starting. "And let 'em end well. Don't have any tragedy. Our readers don't like it."

Well, I didn't want any tragedy myself, if I was going to create these simple, vulnerable people by the gross. Let them be happy if they could, on my page at least. They did not look to me very palpably happy in actuality. At that time, having the pristine

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strength of all my senses, legs adequate to run, blood in a splendid steady rush, I hadn't thought much about the positive happiness sprung from a vital body and desires that tally with the earth's great promptings. That was my commonplace. Delight lay in the unattained. I thought nobody could be happy unless he was on the road to being a poet, or at least to foothold on some terraced height of art; and my Italians, as I saw them, lived meagrely. But I could make stories out of them with a facility that surprised me, and I did it without a thought of the integrity of letters. I could paint a certain kind of picture in little, paint it hastily, but so it caught the eye. So far as the pains and faithfulness of creation went, the picture was a fake. If I had been ambidextrous, I could have done two at once, so ready was my brain, and Wadham would pay me thirty dollars apiece. This was, in a way, a mechanical facility. Under it the strangeness and wonder of life wrought upon me movingly. As I have said, I was well and currents ran swiftly to my brain and carried loud news of the outer world. The changing phases of the world were tumultuous and, as they concerned me, untried, prophetic. Sometime, I felt, an avalanche would start. A whisper would release it from the creative stillness, and as it rushed upon me, I should know it was an avalanche of joy. It would overwhelm me, very likely, sweep away my little house of life; but being joy it could leave me for a century under its frigor and then some destined spring would

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come and I should rise up still unchangeably young—and I should be satisfied. Timidly I told Blake some of these thoughts: that the world looked to me like a procession of flowers, a blossoming so fecund that we too, being its children, had to share the fruits. We couldn't be disinherited. He wasn't much interested, and no wonder: for by word of mouth this mist of feeling got laughably thinned out, and it was in itself foreign to Blake's conceptions. He never complained of the present state of things, but he did feel alien to it. The earth as God sent it out and for a good many æons afterward drew his fancy mightily. But he hated the horrible artificial barriers man has devised in his honest attempts at good housekeeping. "You can look at the stars," Blake said, "and still see God. But you've got to keep your eyes away from men and their damned contrivances." He hated the cumbrous machinery of what we call civilization; but if you asked him how we were going to exist on this planet that refuses us even protection from the cold, without policemen and telephones and undertakers and the gross burden of food, he would swear a large oath and walk off. But about what he called life, in his larger sense, he was ready enough to talk. He held that all life throws off life by the energy of its being, and he argued that humanity had, in absolute madness, woven a veil for the face of nature and so cut itself off from the apprehension of God. It had fabricated a scheme of religion and politics and social ethics, and it

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would have been nearer God if it had staid on a mountain top with a shepherd's crook.

"Mount Washington?" Jakie suggested. "You couldn't camp out on mountain tops in this climate without your winter flannels. And that would call for a woollen factory down below, and an express to bring you the flannels, and the big driving wheel would be whirring again."

But this Jakie said with a sort of shamed candor, because, so compelling was Blake's personality, that we couldn't flout him without feeling we had made light of something that had a mystic value in unknown courts.

"Poetry," I ventured humbly to suggest. "Men made poetry."

"Poetry," said Blake, "is a dweller in the air. She lives in heaven really, but when, of her own compassion, she curves nearer us, a few of her pinions drop, now and then, weighted with our grime — the smoke of our chimneys where we make things to keep our insides muddy — these pinions flutter down to us and we snatch at them and stick them in our caps. But we no more see Poetry as she is in the skyey regions where, a maid in her Father's house, she wanders at her happy tasks, than we see the soul here clamped into a gross body."

I accepted what he said about poetry as I should about the composing of music and everything that was immeasurably above me. Poetry was, to my concep-

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tion, an ecstasy of divine according, a stream that flowed without let from some fount of sacred lineage. I didn't quite believe that poets coaxed their inspiration and turned the coat of a phrase and made it over and trimmed it here and there, took a little homesick adjective out of one line and gave it lodgment in another. When Blake was hammering, as he said, I thought it was his bluff way of characterizing the secondary pains of creation, polishing the sword that has been welded, but in no wise altering its shape, and still with that big cosmic rage of certainty and intuition. I had a queer inner rhythmic life of my own. When I was afire with the warm blood of a tramp — just long enough to make the nerves and muscles cry for more and yet not long enough for that other ecstasy of quiescence and the apathy of tire — swift phrases came to me that I liked to repeat to myself to the rhythm of it all, the motion we call living. But I humbly never thought of them as neighbor even to poetry. They would have to spring full-fledged from the Titan workshops of inspiration before I could capture them and bring them into the market-place.

I was working hot and hard now, doing my stories of Little Italy, and Wadham was printing them, one a week, and the boys were clapping me on the back and frankly implying they didn't know I had it in me. They didn't specify what it was I had in me: something, I fancied, they didn't wholly respect. Blake said nothing. One day when they had been pressing

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him to praise me, he did take up a paper and run through one of my things. But his face never changed beyond its dogged and kindly earnest. He had not much opinion of prose except in the great essays. Modern scratching seemed but to deface the walls of time.

"You've lost your old-fashioned flavor," he said, and he threw the paper down.

I couldn't tell whether he considered it desirable that I should have lost it. Perhaps he thought if I were patient and lived out the normal good in me I could write an essay. And then the incredible happened. An emissary — he seemed to me angelic then, though he came in string tie and eccentric collar, smoking a cigarette — an emissary of one of the great New York magazines came to our door and was let in by Mary. He wanted me to write some more Little Italy, and he would pay me such a price that I leaped at the thought of a velvet dress for Mary and a house in the country to be known as the Toasted Cheese. As I said, Mary had let him in, and she came up to my room and told me savagely Fortune had arrived. I believe she could have etherized me there and left me on my own bed while she led Blake down to the offer of rewards, if that could be. Mary, like all of us, had a fury of partisanship for Blake up there in his workshop. He would never advance himself, we knew. If we could have pushed him, his name would have been on all the literary banners of our tongue. He would have been

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famous even before he had earned it, such was his personal quality and the integrity of the promissory notes that inner power of his was always fluttering. At any rate, I was made, I saw with a kind of bewilderment, and in another week came a second herald from the land of ink and I was made again. There was never anything warmer than the outcry and crowings of the boys over my distinguished luck. I deserved it, they said. These were neat little tales, one or more with a tendency to Maupassant with clothes on; but they had to allow for that direct and subtle combination outside the knowledge of men, known as luck. It had to be taken into account. So when they went down to Romney, I was left sticking to my desk like a fly enamoured of the ink-pot, while I got a suitable batch ready for my publishers to bolt. This Blake recommended. Editors were fickle, though passionate, folk, he said. They would engage without qualifications to-day and to-morrow, in cooler blood, say what you sent was not up to the standard of the sample that had caused you to be desired. Therefore, lest some newer god attract their errant fancy, it was best to do their stunts to-day. So I stayed mewed up in my hot room and aunt Cely toiled up with cool drinks and Mary, too, after her work was done: dear Mary, with her haggard face and her mother eyes that cried for assuagement for all the children of men. To-day I never hear ice clinking when weather is hot or answer the call of a crackling fire when it is cold, without thinking of our mothering Mary.

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We had letters from the boys in the barn. They were enchanted with it, Johnnie said. They had at last got speech with the Ivory May.

"What's this?" I was trying to read it out. Blake was up for the night doing some proof and meaning to curse Wadham on the morrow. He had to be brutal with him, for Wadham would have turned the *Bally Thief* into all kinds of a fatuous goat with bells and ribbons whenever his fancy changed. He was mild and humble before Blake though, who had occasionally to take him to pieces and put him together again lest the *Thief* become even too wobbly for his own distinguished services. "What's this?" I said. "It looks like Ivory — Ivory May?"

"It's a girl down there," said Blake. He was tired and was smoking, something he did now when he had to reconcile himself in some special way to life. He and Mary and I sat out in the back yard, and the moon was over us and a piano execrably strummed Egmont, and aunt Cely within pared pineapples for the preserving.

"Pretty?" said Mary.

This was quick as lightning. I thought, as she pounced, she looked jealously at Blake. For he had just come from the atmosphere of the Ivory May. He gave her no satisfaction, though this was not by intent, but only because he was tired.

"Elkins" — this was the artist among us who had a color theory and couldn't draw — "Elkins says her

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color's remarkable. She's very slim. Waist no bigger than your wrist" — I could see Mary picturing his sacred hand held out to span it — "Yellow hair — no, golden. And a blanched ivory look. You'd think it would be unhealthy. But it's not. It's very effective."

I laughed, to lighten Mary up.

"She might be a tapestry," said I.

"So she is. She's decorative. She's somebody's companion or secretary or nurse, and she totes the old lady in a wheeled chair. Jakie trails along after her. So does — by George, I believe they all do."

"How does the old lady like it?" asked Mary cuttingly.

"She likes it, on the whole. She's got something the matter with her speech, but she's the dickens for curiosity. Jakie tells her anything that comes into his head. She had one of your stories, Redfield, open on her knee. Jakie told her you got five to seven hundred apiece for 'em. When you coming down?"

"To-morrow," said I. It was really without reference to the girl all gold-colored hair and whiteness. I had finished my present job and I was sick of the city, of Wadham and my pretty prospects. Only it seemed a pity to leave Mary alone in the dust and heat. "But what is it they call her?" I went back to it and to the letter. "Ivory May. Is May her name?"

Blake was on his feet now, staring at the moon, not Mary, and Mary looked wistfully at him, seizing the

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chance because he also might go on the morrow, and his every gesture even she wanted to have thriftily by heart.

"That's Jake. He's just found out 'may' is archaic for maid, and he's running it hard."

"What's her real name?" asked Mary, pat on the heels of this. I thought she hoped it was Sapphira at the least. But Blake didn't remember, and when he told her so, she smiled.

VII

HER name was Mildred Lee. I went down to Romney the next day — though urged by no curiosity to see her — and found the boys lying round on new-mown hay: for Johnnie McCann had borrowed a scythe and hacked off about a quarter of an acre of grass, and the fragrance of it had got into their nostrils and their imagination, and they couldn't have enough of it. The barn was a delightful place, a gallery built round it inside and little cubicles opening from it like monkish cells, each with a window to a view over the incredibly green fields. I felt the old country allurement, its tyranny upon me at once, the aching ecstasy of home, and also the conviction of the boy brought up on a farm and never quite escaping that before playtime he has got to rake the grass and feel the stubble toughening his toes, and know again the thirst of the sweltering day and the taste of warm "sweetened water" under

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a tree. It had had a different effect on the others. They, being town bred, took it as they saw it, a picture made for playtime, and determined on founding a brotherhood, of themselves alone, so far as I could see, and living here in the shade of trees, listening to a perennial thrush in an unfading wood and going once a day to the Apple Tree to dinner, and once to intercept the Ivory May, when she conducted her charge to take the air. I reminded them that the trees they laid lien on for a hospitable roof would in December be the "bare ruined choirs" that yield no shelter from the snow they were not reckoning with. But they told me to shut up and sank back into their lethargy of summer realized, and I could see that time was not for them because the present did supremely well. We lay on the grass that morning and talked intermittently and foolishly. Jakie was caught by the aura of my glory in short stories, and was writing some of his own. But they wouldn't do because he had the teasing James habit, and they were full of "lucidity" and the antiphonal chant of "wonderful." Blake had told him it wouldn't do, Blake who read Mr. James not for business but in a wild and glorious debauch, he loved him so, and who had the sense to know we groundlings never could adequately do the trick. But Jakie was not to be deterred. He was hammering away at a sketch of an old lady who had a likeness to a gargoyle on Notre Dame and had conceived a hatred for her niece who featured an angel there. Nobody could tell what it

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was about, to speak humanly, or what the outcome proved to be, which was the point, Blake said, of sorry difference between Mr. James and his following. You could always tell what Mr. James was about, if you lived long enough, though not all of it. You were likely to discover a year or two after you had run over the fine lines of the palimpsest that there were equally fine ones underneath. These things we talked of that morning as we spread ourselves on the drying grass and I nuzzled it and Jakie read his stuff and nobody but me listened because they had heard it several times before. I told him it was good, my drowsy eyes shut and my lying mouth down in the grass.

"It's not," said Jakie. "You know it, too."

"Maybe I do," said I, out of the grass.

"But when it comes to that, your own Little Italy stuff ain't worth shucks," said Jakie. "It's a crying shame to take money for it."

"Oh, I know it," said I. And really I did. It was incarnate wonder to me to think of the configuration of the heads that wanted my Little Italy.

"It's false, that's what it is," said Jakie, raging. "False from nave to chime. You haven't got inside that organ and monkey contingent down there. You don't live under their skins. You never even went there for a dish of macaroni."

"I know that," said I. The sun had got to my knees, my face was in a green shadow, and the scent of earth was in my nostrils and the birds sang.

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"By golly!" said Tilford Weston. He was a conscientious little fellow grinding out household notes for the *Kitchen Friend*, and hoping to rise to editorial work and have his lass come home from the West to marry him. "There she is."

Instantly they were on their feet, and I was on mine, from the mere force of example, as men eat oatmeal or go to war.

"What is it?" I inquired.

They paid no attention to me. They walked in a body straight across the field and over a stone wall, and I followed. If there were going to be more scents, more birds or any added affluence of spring, I meant to be first at the fount. Then I saw her coming along the country road, Mildred Lee, walking beside the wheeled chair where her charge grotesquely reigned. Mildred had one hand upon the chair as if she guided it through some force of inner magic: for the actual propulsion was accomplished by him we knew, Johnnie McCann, who had, the others saw ragingly, bought off the customary man and piously fallen into his place. A hatred, livid as the constraining spark of a million feuds, came upon our men, hatred for Johnnie who had done them and who was serenely tooling along, piety and softness upon his lips and the devil's own spark in his eyes, for he, too, knew they had been done. But after bareheaded prostrations, so deep were they, to the old creature of the chair and the picture of youth and spring that walked beside,

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they fell upon Johnnie with chorusing protests of false friendship.

"That's too heavy for you, old man," said Weston meltingly. "Give me a hold."

And Jakie took a hold without asking. But nobody had presented me, and I walked along, saying nothing; but as I walked I looked with the instancy of the man who sees no possibility of doing otherwise, at Mildred Lee. I have in my mind to-day the picture of her as she walked under the trees: a girl in seeming, though really she was a little older than I, a girl with a pale face of an enchanting shape, especially about the chin, blue eyes — not warm eyes but such as might hold reserves of light behind them — and a careless way of using a red-lipped mouth, — not a full mouth, none of the bud about it, or the pout of provocation, the "Don't you wish you might, sir," that nature sets upon some rose-red mouths in spite of them. This way with her mouth — I can't really explain it, but it was as if she knew and yet was not vain of the exceedingly perfect teeth within, and so might show them in full flood of laughter or let them peep as they would. And as I looked at her, I thought she once or twice glanced at me with a welcoming grace, as if introductions didn't matter, but at the same time she owed me, of her plenty, a welcome to the house of spring and all the gay world of which she was rightful chatelaine. The burden in the chair, Miss Harpinger, I heard her called, was coquetting

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with Jakie who was playing up to her brazen assaults for gallantry in order, it was plain, to keep on her right side, which was the side of him who should push the chair next time. Mildred Lee was telling Weston she knew about his household work. She said she'd been asking the cook at the Apple Tree how many things could be made with corn meal. There were dozens of them. The cook would lend him her book, and he could make almost a column, she was sure. Her voice — I pondered upon that. It was low and of an excellent quality, but there was also something resonant, metallic, golden, I thought. This, I told myself, was the well of reserve in her nature, what, in spite of that graciousness, due to the need of others, hid the sweet warm springs of her own beauty. I fell behind them, and with an instinct that rose from the propulsion of my blood toward the spring and toward her who was the priestess of it, I gathered maple twigs from the saplings by the way, and plaited a garland, and this I brought her, holding it in both hands. And without a blush or the trembling of her dignity, she bent her head a little, as one used to crowns, and I set it on the gold of her hair, and it fitted, every leaf of it, to the hollows and shines beneath. I was not deft with my hands, but this had been a special commission from the god of luck who put the pretty task upon me, and he had directed me and I had scored. The boys looked on and envied a little yet admired more, as we must when some one

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has done a better thing than we think to do. They were chiefly proud of me as the one of them who had thought to crown the spring. Once Mildred came to the front of the wheeled chair to tuck the light rug over Miss Harpinger's feet, and the old lady caught sight of the green circlet on the golden head.

"What's that, Miss Lee?" she had to know, "what's that? Has everybody got crowns on? Nobody's given me a crown."

Whereupon she simpered, and Johnnie McCann was the only one who had the spirit to rush into the brake and bring an apple bough and present it fatuously, kneeling in the dusty road. He told her it was her sceptre, and whatever she commanded we must do. I have never seen a more unhappy spectacle than that of old Mary Harpinger in her wheeled chair, playing the game of youth. She was inert and heavy — afterward, when I knew her, I found she had an eager interest in her food— and she cherished an avid curiosity about the smallest happenings of life. If one could have thought her mind a little faded, compassion might have taken the place of a quick aversion to her. We might have seen the inevitability of the erring track of her mind, and tried to shade it with the green boughs of a pitying tolerance. But she had all the mind she ever had, presumably, only she had let the fair flowers of aspiration go quite to waste, and choked herself with the coarse weeds that flourish in decay. I could hardly

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bear to think of what must be the suffering of a nature like Mildred Lee's, almost too fragile in its delicacy of perception and desire, under the daily attrition of this service. I thought it accounted for what I called the veil of her face and manner, something shielding, guarding the blossomy currents within, the wells of living water that such feet might foul. She, the real Mildred, seemed, not to be in hiding — there was nothing furtive about it — but behind a barrier. I could see how her high maiden honor dwelt there proudly alone, with the tawdry clamor of Mary Harpinger's remembered scandals and appetite for fresh ones surging about it, up to its very portals, like a turgid stream going nowhere. Altogether the seeing her was almost more painful than joyous, as you might go on a pilgrimage to a statue foreshadowed in your dreams, and find it in process of siege by a brutal soldiery. We went back to the Apple Tree with her, and when we left her, she gravely calm and Mary Harpinger ogling to the last, I turned away with a great and exalted sadness on me. I wondered how Blake could have described her as he did, with a commonplace touch, how he should have spoken of her at all, she belonged so to the great sacred silences. The others did not feel this as I did. They talked and chaffed and tossed their hats at butterflies, and when they were out of sight of the house, fell upon Johnnie who had pushed the chair and buffeted him full sore. But I could not talk. I had seen Mildred Lee.

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VIII

THAT afternoon, when the first warmth had gone, I left the fellows and went again into the road, with a presentiment that I should see her. Back and forth from the willow trees to the maples I walked, almost in sight of her house at the one end and our barn at the other, and as I did this, always with an expectant heart, I saw her coming. She wore the same white dress, and over her shoulders a little scarf of faintest blue. As I went forward to her, she was charmingly though not warmly smiling, and a pace away she put out her hand. Neither of us, I thought, was hindered in swift friendliness by not having been named to each other in the common way. We seemed to have prescience, as of those who had to meet. I turned about with her, and we walked on, I very happy in a fashion I had not known. Only I wished afterward Egerton Sims could have been there and shared my delight in her and the honor of my state. She often came out, she said, for a little walk when Miss Harpinger was asleep. It was her only time. I kept myself from saying how horrible Miss Harpinger seemed to me, and she went on into the boundaries of my own life, as if, to please me, we must talk of me.

"I've been reading your Little Italy."

I wondered how she had come on Wadham's banal publication, and she explained that the boys had

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loaned her a copy or two among other things to read to Miss Harpinger. They had had a couple of copies perhaps and then Miss Harpinger sent for more — for a file, in fact. I felt a sudden distaste at having the Little Italy side of me the one she was to know. I implied that I didn't think much of those enterprises.

"Oh, but the big magazines think something of them," she reminded me. "You've had splendid offers."

The big magazines, I told her, even they, wanted to print what the many-headed liked to hear. They'd shave a good many corners of popularity before they'd throw out what the many-headed were barking for.

"But it's a splendid chance," she insisted. "Now you can get anywhere."

This, instead of glorifying my outlook, depressed me instead, until I reflected that the goddess of spring need not necessarily be endowed with all gifts, among them a correct literary taste.

"Blake doesn't think anything of them," I said. "You've seen Blake."

I felt that was enough. Her brows drew together slightly at the mention of Blake, and immediately I wondered whether there were something in him that did not march with the most crystalline ideals. Yet not so, for Mary loved him. Mary would have rushed, tooth and claw, upon any who denied his poetic and unimpeachable godhead. Mildred Lee hesitated before answering, and then she seemed to be stepping

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round Blake delicately as a feline creature, observing him from every point.

"A man might write splendid poetry, mightn't he, and yet not be a critic?" This she put to me with a highly flattering implication of my infallibility.

"Oh, yes," I said. "But Blake knows such a lot. He goes digging into the centuries. If there's anything there, in any rubbish heap, Blake's sure to find it."

"But mightn't that make him all the more unlikely to understand his own century?"

It might, but try as I would I could not snatch content from her charming consolation. I knew Blake. But I wanted her to talk about other things that she only knew. I could test literature in its shop, take it from the lips of its disciples; but I wanted this creature made of such rare sweetnesses to tell me how she juggled the spring into coming, what she heard from the birds that morning, where the fairy queen was at this moment. I wanted her to sing to me "old, far-off, forgotten things." I knew she could sing, perhaps in strange intervals with that low moving voice of hers, intervals the world has forgotten in its march from fairyland. (As a matter of experience and after proving, Mildred Lee could not sing; but that made no difference to my assumptions that afternoon.) But she was talking again by implication about Blake and me, ranging us side by side. She was not so sure of the value, she said, of these

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researches into the past. Give her a live man's impressions of the world as it is.

"But that isn't my Little Italy stories," I told her sadly, and yet with a tender gratitude for her championship. "They're not real. They're a kind of fake."

She shook her head.

"That's your modesty," said she. "The publishers know, or they wouldn't be ready to exploit you."

I dragged her away from Little Italy, dragged her by the main force of insistency. I was determined to know things about her, and since I was sure no such creature as she would feel tenderness for Mary Harpinger, I asked her bluntly—

"Do you like Miss Harpinger?"

"Oh, yes," said she, in the unmoved monotone of her sweet voice. "She's very nice."

Then I saw loyalty constrained her, but I pushed on into the breach.

"It's a horrible thing," I said hotly, "horrible, for you to be tied to a creature like that."

She put out her hand. I thought for a happy moment of implied intimacy she was about to lay it on my arm. But it was only a girl's movement, unconsidered, free, and she withdrew it.

"How good you are," she said.

It would be of no use for me to try recording the things we said that day, on that walk of perhaps an hour, but the hour was painted for me in fadeless

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hues, not the prismatic glitter of youth, but all the soft and gentle lendings of accumulated memories of poetry and song. Whatever I had learned, whatever I unconsciously aspired to, broke into blossom that day, or crested in rainbow colors on the sea of life. I knew nothing about the seventeenth century; but I had attained. We parted at the turn of the road, for I could see she hesitated at having me go farther, and I could fancy Mary Harpinger risen from her nap and cackling at the window over her companion's acquisition of a young man. There was in my attitude the passionate implication and the acquiescence in hers that we were to meet again. I stood at the turn and watched her, and she waved her hand to me. Then I took an hour's walk by myself, plunging through fields and once encountering a marsh, because the road, with its possibilities of one or two passers, looked too populous, and I got home to the barn to find the boys in riotous concoction of a gigantic rarebit made out of all the cheese in the neighborhood. I was morose to a ridiculous degree. They could not stir me out of my sulks, and when Jakie tipped a wink at Johnnie McCann and said, "He's got it bad," I laid my hand incidentally on the stick somebody had cut in a walk and gripped it, feeling temporary easement in knowing I was big enough to warm them both.

The next day was a gray day, although the sun shone to a marvel, because Miss Harpinger had an indigestion, and Mildred Lee just looked out of doors for five

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minutes on me hanging like a fool in the croquet-consecrated yard; and that night Blake came. The boys must have told him about my deplorable state, for he was very kind to me in a gentle, considering way. It was almost as if he saw me in a nearer perspective than he had since that night when he had hope of the seventeenth century. After it had grown dusk and the moon came out distractingly splendid, he sauntered to the door and called me.

"Come on out, Redfield. There's something doing here."

I went, relieved to flee the rest of them who were ignoring the moon and torturing a mandolin nobody knew how to play, yielding it from hand to snatching hand. Blake and I struck into the road and began to walk at a good pace. I watched the darkness with straining eyes, and my face grew hot at the thought that she, too, might escape for a fit communion with Diana. She could not — and yet! Blake began to talk, and to my amazement he was confiding in me. He was writing a play, a play in blank verse of an ideal kingdom governed by a regent, the mother of the young prince, and really governed by the young poet who had resung the old folk-songs of the harvest field and the plough and let the songs of steel and valor crash into oblivion. And this was Arcady until the brutal world and war came hurtling in, and Arcady went down because the world is not yet ready for it. I was listening, although my eyes were still straining for Mildred Lee

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and my heart beat madly for her. Whatever your mood, Blake had to be listened to. He was so great that his call had to be answered like the call of kings, or the bugle that summons an army. Wouldn't Napoleon's army rise now if the bugle sounded? The soldiers may be asleep or dead, but they come. There are those men whose inner force is so potent that they have to be listened to. It was not vanity in me, though I might have been proud to be singled out for Blake's confiding. It was because this was Blake. Afterward I suspected him of breaking his rule of solitary conception because they had told him I was under the madness of foolish first love and he generously wanted to recall me to what seemed to him the greater mystery.

"It must be stunning," I said at last, when he had worked up one of his scenes for me.

For answer he did what I had never known Blake to do before. He began repeating his poetry, not spouting it, as we might irreverently have said of a lesser man, not declaiming it, but simply talking it out in a low, almost wondering voice, as if he were rather amazed at himself for doing it, or at the beauty of it, being done. We both felt the rhythm of it, and our feet set themselves to it or paused at the will of our delighted minds when it broke up into anapestic fervor. But alas for his selection, if he had meant to draw me out of love to his dear art: for he had fallen upon the scene where it was all love, and the world

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well set to its fulfilment. There was ever something austere about Blake's genius; yet he saw the earth as it was, inevitably, his eye was so keen. He saw with a patient compassion the great web nature spreads for us that her spaces may be peopled and her fecundities eaten up, the veil, the film she lays upon the eyes of girl and boy that they may desire each other overwhelmingly. Not feeling it himself, save as a call from wildest nature he refused, he yet recorded inevitably the thrill of the nerves, the ecstasy of the exhilarated brain under the spell of nature the omnipotent, love the sorcerer. And this scene he repeated to me was nothing but a love poem full of the madness of life and the desire of its continuance. And as his grave exultant voice went on — exultant because he, the lucky one, had found such harmonies — the earth was my master and my plaything. I was at one with all her purposes. And yet it did not seem to me the earth. It seemed a region as lucent and new discovered as a planet swinging that night in the palpitant air. I was the first man, and I had been spared Eden and the climbing steps through being to a paradise attained. I was in paradise at a leap. When he finished, I couldn't speak. Then he seemed to see what he had done. His voice, grave and gentle, — for a moment it sounded like the voice of my old friend in counsel — recalled me.

"But that," said he, "is the love of the prince. It is only earthly love. When we come to the last act

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there will be the love of the poet, and that is the heavenly."

"But the prince," I said, like a green boy; "you'll let the prince be happy."

"No," said Blake, "he can't be. He's under the spell of the earth. You see that. He's got to share all her gigantic treacheries, the crumbling of her atoms, the disintegration of the tangible. And then he struggles through that, reaching up, always reaching up, until he reaches kingship and the great calls and duties."

"But the princess," I said. She seemed to me Mildred Lee, and my eyes were hot with tears for her set in this barren spot of kings attaining to kingship through the downfall of their love. I wanted her to live in a garden of sweet sun and shade. "She can't reach up." As I saw her, I knew she mustn't. She was made for delicate uses, for weaving and wearing the garlands of life, not to grow gaunt in the service of it. His voice grew harsh, I thought.

"Then," he said, "she'll have to be left behind."

I remembered what he said of the poet.

"What do you mean," I asked, "by the heavenly love?"

Blake stopped and looked up into the sky. The moon was riding there, conquering wreath after wreath of cloud and carrying with her her own iridescent mist. I followed his eyes, and then mine came down to his face. It was thrown back at the angle that, in a picture, might have suited adoration. I could see the

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liquid gleam of the eyes. The lips were slightly parted. He looked magnificently alive with noble feeling, and I wished Mary could see him, Mary who challenged no more from him than gentle kindliness. But he had no answer for me. Blake was absorbed in the aspect of creation, of re-creation, the flux of things, stern prophecies. He had not a momentary doubt of the continuous wonders of the world. To be bored, to be dissatisfied in a universe like this, all ceaseless activities, would have been to him banal beyond expression. He was always anxiously looking — anxiously because he was afraid of escaping something his eyes were meant to see — always waiting on the Lord of the aspect of things to see what might be doing next. But he recalled himself, turning back to me.

"Redfield," he said, and there was a note in his voice that touched me profoundly, of fellowship, of tenderness even, "come back to town with me. You'd better."

Why had I better? I asked stupidly. The ache and glow had gone out of me. He had been challenging me to higher issues than entrance to the earth and her green bowers, and it tired my mind and my will. Whatever there was of renunciation in this pursuit of the heavenly love, I did not want it, if it meant surrender of one kiss in the moonlight here. Furthermore, my love for Mildred Lee was heavenly, of itself, by birth royal, as hers should be for me. Besides, the hour was getting on and the road was untenanted save for our two

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pacing figures. I had turned at each end of a rather long tether and made Blake go back and forth, lest we should miss her. But she was not coming. I felt dull and cold.

"Come," said Blake, even more persuasively, as we reached the barn and were about to enter the mandolin tortured atmosphere, "come back with me to-morrow." And then he added, as if this also he might venture, "Think it over."

IX

PERHAPS I did not once think it over. It may have seemed to me that there was nothing that could be deliberated upon without doing violence to so great a theme, but everything to be lifted to a supersensual zone of ecstasy where the body and soul are one. I went back to town because my task was calling me, and there I distinguished the first day of what seemed to me my exile from Mildred Lee by being cross to Mary. This was because I wanted her to let me alone, and I can see now the sudden grieved darkening of her honest eyes. Nobody ever had eyes of such an appealing candor, such clarity of intent as Mary. She went away quite softly and thoughtfully (I believe she had brought me something cool to drink), and when she had gone, I threw myself down on the bed in my hot room and perfunctorily cursed myself for a boor: but it was indeed mechanical cursing because it was only

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decent that I should be condemned. Really with the live part of my mind I was down at Romney breathing a finer air, and crowning Mildred Lee with the lush tribute of the spring. I had no purposes about her. She was, and I had found her, by the exquisite chance of the hour, and as soon as might be I was going back to her. I fancy Blake told Mary I was in the toils of this young passion, for she was very gentle to me when we met, quite as if I had been through some alarming physical experience and was not yet strong. She bore no malice for my mood. Mary, by nature flavored all through with the essence of wifehood and motherhood, never did bear malice. She hoped all things, believed all things, and was kind. I had notes for a dozen stories of Little Italy, but when I sat down to write I could only lay my dull head on my arms upon the table and wish and wish — for Mildred Lee. And on the evening of the third day, when I had tried with every nerve and impulse in me to whip up flagging imagination and spur my pen to do its task, I saw it was of no use whatever. I was not half a man without her — not half? Not an inch of me was good for fight. And I took my bag and stole out of the house so that Blake and Mary should not know. I got a train at seven, and in the early dusk I was walking up the road to her fast, fast, my heart beating as hearts beat only once or twice in a whole long life. That night is with me now, the feel of it, the smell, and the ache of my young blood. It was all hurry, hurry, to be where alone was peace,

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and would be, so I knew, forevermore. I went straight to the Apple Tree, where ladies, multitudinous ladies, it seemed to me, were sitting on the veranda singing "Old Folks at Home." I passed the ordeal of their questioning eyes, and went into the little parlor vilely tinged with the kerosene of its lamp, and after I had sent up my name by an overalled boy, I stood there conscious only of the life of the beating heart. At once she came, in white as I had seen her before, but in an incredible deshabille, her long hair braided and hanging to her belt. She had evidently gone up for the night, but she ignored being unprepared to see a stranger, such as I might well have seemed to her. Only I was at once aware that I was not a stranger, though I was humbly ready to accept my place. There was an understanding between us, a thrill of quickened life, it might be, or was it only, as I wondered afterward, her miraculous comprehension of me and her acceptance, as something that was to be? I put out my hands to her and took both hers and clung to them because she was my help. My own grasp must have seemed like fetters, it was so desperate. And I said her name twice, "Mildred! Mildred!"

She did not answer a word, nor did she withstand me. She listened a second, I saw, her head inclined ever so little to the veranda where the song had ceased and there was a confused suggestion of, "What shall we sing now?"

"Come," she said then, in a low, moving voice (ah,

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how athirst I had been to hear her voice) and she was stepping softly yet quickly to the side door and I was following.

How my hands had been persuaded to leave her wrists I did not know; but she was free and I was following, shaken to my soul, understanding at last the terrifying impact of the soul upon the body and the body on itself. Out through the dark we went and along a little path I took again afterward to the orchard where there seemed to be light indeed, but the light of the apple blooms themselves. And there she stopped and said, "You came back!" in that low voice, not moved perhaps by wonder or delight, and yet thrilling me to both, and I said her name again, and at that, with her consent, bewilderingly with it, for it was a part of this heaven-made night, my arms were about her and my lips on hers. And then silence and again the beating of my heart. And she said in a whisper,— and I could have cried out with the wonder of its being so near and the breath of it on my cheek,—

"I must go."

I held her. Go now, when we had but met?

"She's very nervous to-night," said Mildred.

She? Miss Harpinger? I felt myself wince at that name brought like an ill breath into our paradise.

"Their singing on the piazza bothers her frightfully," she explained.

And though I implored her by words and the bold touch of her cheek to throw that obligation to the winds,

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go she would. And she forbade me to return to the house. There was a way, she said, across the wall and into the road. That I must take. And I must get back to town that night. There was an express at ten. I obeyed her without question, stipulating only that she should leave me when she must, and I would go with her to the dusky confines of the orchard and watch her across the path of light from the lamp within. And she did go at once, gently inexorable against my childish pleas, and I watched her as I had desired, and her whiteness slipped away from me and was lost. Then I, scarcely looking my happiness in the face as yet, walked the country road until there was scant time to take the train, and did get it, and at something after eleven was in my own hot little room again, wondering, wondering at the world for being so beautiful — so beautiful and so secret, for I had never seen it so before — and myself for having attained its chief of wonders. I wrote to her before I slept, and while I sat there throwing off page after page of fervid asseveration, Mary and aunt Cely sat down there in the yard below in a monotone of talk.

Next morning I was a new man. I could work again. I must work, my triumphing heart told me, for now I had thrones and altars to build, and woman's soft needs to satisfy. And as I am a living man, not knowing to this day how I did it, I wrote two stories of Little Italy before nightfall, to the tune of four hundred dollars each, and they were of my best, and

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I knew I could do the same every day with that great golden bribe of heaven's making to draw me on. And that night of course I wrote to her again.

X

Now it might easily be disbelieved that, from this time until I married Mildred Lee I saw her only six times in all. Those incredible six times, each one starred and written in red in the book of my heart! once in the orchard, once on a hot Sunday when I came down to be with the boys and walked with them and her interminable miles in the space of half an hour, silent and raging because I could not speak to her alone, once on the veranda of the inn when the rain was whirling and the old ladies had all gone into the dining room to play cards and knit. That day had been darkness itself without her, and when twilight came and the rain with it, I had thrown my papers together on my table in the little Burke Street room, and desperately, whether I was to find welcome or not, run to the station and gone to the Apple Tree door with a purpose of demanding her, as if even the little boy in the overalls wanted to keep her from me. But she, heaven sent, I knew, had strayed to the door for a breath and met me, and now came out and put her hand on my arm and we paced back and forth, back and forth in silence, and my tempest calmed. I can feel to this day the

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wet breath of the wind as it lashed at us when we turned by the woodbine to go back again, and still I could say nothing, nothing — for was not her company all I asked? And twice there were really long talks, long, serious talks in the pine woods behind the house, pacing back and forth and settling what our life together was to be. This was after Miss Harpinger had been told and had gone into unbridled tantrums at Mildred Lee for leaving her when Mary Harpinger had thought she had engaged her for a mortal span, and against me for daring to pluck her servitor away from her. All this I knew by letter. Miss Harpinger was unappeasably angry. She had taken to her bed. She caterwauled like an affronted beast. She offered every inducement to be good if only Mildred Lee would stay with her. We wrote daily, Mildred in her firm square hand always dispassionate chronicles of the latest that had occurred, and I in love's rhythm. And to this she said not a word save in a postscript twice, a little line, "You are a silly boy." And this I thought very gracious of her, and very tender indeed for one so highly set. But it was she who summoned me for the first talk in the orchard, and met me there on the moment. She wore a light blue dress, and I put into her hands the white roses I had brought. Foolish, ill-done perhaps, to bring the florist's nurslings into this surging country life. But I had to bring her something, and as yet nothing had seemed good enough to buy. There

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was the little ring, a turquoise and two tiny diamonds — how alive the stones were on her white hand! — but really nothing but flowers looked worthy of her. She held the roses to her breast, and we walked, my hand touching her bare elbow, softly, because as yet I had a noble fear of her. It was a beautiful fear, more wondrous then to me than the heights of possession as I saw them. This day we talked of many things. The wedding day was set, and had been for a week, — the third of September, and now we were in June. But she could not possibly, she said, leave Miss Harpinger before. That would give her time to get reconciled, and Mildred time to hire a new companion and break her in.

"I wonder," she said then, so hesitatingly that I thought this was shyness and I had found a new beauty in her, "I wonder if we could consider having her live with us."

"Who?" I asked stupidly.

"Miss Harpinger."

I could only repeat the name, again stupidly. I could as easily imagine a person who had escaped Miss Harpinger deliberating over a return as I could the trainer of his own will taking an afternoon nap in the lion's mouth.

"She is not a young woman," said Mildred, not as if she were persuading me, but perhaps setting the case before us both impartially. "She hasn't long to live. I've asked the doctor to tell me that quite

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frankly. She's rich, you know, oh, really rich. She could live anywhere, but she'd give her little finger to be with us. She'd make it up to us. She's got no relatives."

The sequence of things flashed into my head, and with it the shameful implication that I was being tempted: not by her — no, no, but by my own base nature that could do its little sum and come to the result that Mary Harpinger, helped gently down the grade of years, might pay for kindness at the end.

"No," I said, the more violently that I was ashamed with a shame Mildred could never share, "no, no."

She seemed to accept that at once, gently, temperately, as she always met me, and answered: —

"There'd be room enough, you see. We haven't talked houses yet, have we?"

No, we hadn't talked them, but I had my little plan. There was a new apartment house on the corner of Burke Street and Palm. Its windows, some of them, overlooked the garden where aunt Cely and Mary held their summer powwows. We might even see them there paring pineapples in the season. I thought Mary would like that. I knew I should. And the new apartments had modern conveniences. The sign said so. All this about the size of the apartments and their having a place to dry washing on the roof, I poured out to Mildred and she listened with her unvarying interest, and at the end she said: —

"Have you ever noticed those houses on Osborne

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Street, the ones with the big knockers and the fanlights over the doors?"

Osborne Street! we could as well go to Russia as go to Osborne Street. I gasped as much.

"Dearest," I said, in an agony over having to deny her, "you ought to have everything, but I'm poor."

She put up the roses and slapped my cheek with them, a petal slap, all velvety and fragrant.

"You go in, when you get back, and take a look at them," she said; "34 and 36 are vacant."

What good would it do me to take a look at them? But I did go, and I did take a look, and the calm beauty and coolness of them in the summer day wrapped me round beguilingly. I wandered up and down in number 34 — that had the view of the west over the water — and thought I was dreaming about how it would seem if the dining-table could be here, and her boudoir there, and wonderful little intimate corners up and down. I gave myself quite up to it, this dreaming, so that I could write her about it that night like a beautiful fairy story of what we could have if we only could. But when I sat down to the table to write it, the words got twisted, and instead of telling it like a dream I told it as if it were true, and next day I went and signed the lease for it, and behold all the little intimate corners in it were to be ours after all.

Another time I saw her was when, in a madness of young love, I dashed down to Romney and summoned her to the parlor with its tidies and mottoes, only to

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ask her if she had loved anybody before she loved me, and then in the same breath adjured her if she had never to let me know. But paying no manner of heed to this last, she was answering, so simply and directly that my heart blessed her for it, that she had once been engaged to marry "a sort of cousin, Tom Gorham, who had gone to South America and taken a position there."

"To make money." My jealous heart prompted my jealous lips. "To make money to let you marry. Where is he now?"

She didn't know. His uncle, in whose banking house he had been, had had a dreadful and complete failure, and she had written Tom that it was useless for them to think of marrying after all. So the engagement was broken, and Tom had married out there — a colored person, she believed. I was immediately no more jealous of Tom. Othello could not have compassed passion in the face of her precision of detail, and his marrying a colored person perhaps without delay.

But while I was whirling through paradise at such a pace, so that even the flowers there made a blur of brightness only, the boys knew nothing about the structural strength of the palace I had built. They were very good to me in a gentle, humane, patient way, as if I were still having an illness and must be humored. That amused me when I thought of it, but really I thought of it, or of them, only incidentally: for I saw everything through fog at this time, everything but

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Mildred Lee and the house. As to the house itself, I had no idea how I was to pay for it; but that gave me no manner of discomfort. One miracle had happened, and the succession of miracles was easy. The old logical sequence of life was interrupted, and now I had every reason to know I was thenceforth to be treated like a prince of the blood. This was not my desert, I was still humble enough to guess. It was only because my life had been linked to Mildred Lee.

One day in July when I was doing great stunts at journalism — for I had caught on after a fashion on a daily paper and was down on the wharfs and in the thick of the car strike — I met Johnnie McCann, he going down the harbor, as he instantly told me with cheerfulness, because he felt one of his suicidal fits coming on, and he thought a whiff of salt air might do him good.

"Great luck, these days, for the Toasted Cheese," said he. He was carrying his straw hat in his hand — it had an absurd red, white, and blue ribbon — and he looked like the merriest of little grigs instead of a fellow chronically challenging the last change. I thought he meant my luck, and asked him how he knew.

"Why, all of us know," said he. "I should take it mighty unfriendly of him if we didn't."

"Of him?"

"Of Blake. You're in the house with him. You ought to know."

I hadn't seen Blake for a fortnight, and I was ashamed

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to say that, or that I didn't know. But Johnnie was full of his subject, and had to enlarge upon it in a way equivalent to telling me. Blake, it seemed, had as good as sold his poetic drama to Montresor, who called himself the leading actor of the day. They were to meet when Montresor got back from Europe, to go over certain finical details in the second act. But that was all, absolutely all that had been challenged in the play, and Montresor had practically taken it. Johnnie wasn't thinking about me, and I was relieved because now I needn't excuse myself, and nettled in that they hadn't missed me more. But when I got home that night I ran up to Blake's room and found him sizzling over proof.

"I've had this set up," he said to me. "My play, yes. Confound the thing. No, no, I don't dare to cuss it. But it's given me an awful lot of bother. I don't know now whether my rhymes rhyme or my feet march. I've mulled over it till I'm blind to it and heard it till I'm deaf."

He looked tremendously excited and worried, too, not in the least like a man who has had good fortune. I plunged into that — his good fortune — and he answered me absently.

"Yes, of course it's great luck. Nobody could do anything with it — anything I could bear — but Montresor. Of course he's the top of the tree. But after all, that isn't the point. The point's the thing itself. If it's good, if it's perfect — Redfield," — here

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he grew intimate, in a way exalting me, for Blake seemed such a very great person indeed that I felt myself growing perceptibly since he could confide in me — "Redfield, I give you my word I don't know now whether it's good or whether it isn't. Suppose it limps. Suppose it isn't winged at all, but goes thud, thud, words tottering out to their own destruction. I could give up the ship if that's so. Yes, I could give up the ship."

He was talking wildly and at random. I wondered what giving up the ship would mean: but he was not capable now of telling me connectedly, and I said, as a species of rather trivial comfort, —

"You read me the love scene. That was great. You know that, don't you?"

Here he brooded and didn't answer this at all. I wished he would let me read it, but I was too shy to ask it, and thought I knew his opinion of me too well.

"Are you working for the *Bally Thief?*" I said, and he started out of his maze, as if in wonder that I could ask.

"No," he said, "oh, no. I haven't had time. I've been reading a lot of Greek — translations, worse luck. I thought it would help, get me into the spirit of the third act. No, I shan't have time to do that sort of thing any more."

Here he forgot me altogether, and I grew rather frightened at seeing how gaunt he looked, as if he hadn't eaten for days, and how his eyes shone. So I ran downstairs to see Mary, and ask her what she thought

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we could do for him. But Mary, aunt Cely said, had been gone a week on her vacation. She had a month this year, and she was spending it in the village where Mr. Haley boarded his sister's boy. The boy wasn't very well, and Mr. Haley thought he should feel easier if Mary would take a look at things. Mr. Haley had run down over Sunday. He could give the last news of Mary. Dear man! he'd be glad to, he was so pleased to think the boy was under Mary's eye. At this I was miffed, and wouldn't have asked him at any price. It was plainly an impertinence for a little, round, redheaded man to absorb our beneficent Mary, especially if Blake needed her. But next day, when I went to Blake's room, he had gone to New York, aunt Cely said, to meet that actor, she believed, something about a play. So I delivered myself over to romances converging on Little Italy, and just before, the very day before Mildred was to come up to buy furniture and rugs, appeared a miraculous emissary of Rees and Dresser, the big New York publishers, with a proposition: to buy me and my work for the space of a year and pay me proportionately for my lost liberty. Journalism was to get its walking ticket. I was not a business man, nor have I ever become one; but that day, with the vision of house rent to pay and multitudinous furniture looming up against me and the Angel in the House imminent to weave the fabric of her future and look at beauties and comforts with sweet unworldly eyes, not recking what they cost: with this tumultuous circumstance against

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me I was galvanized into some sort of shrewdness and fought for money as if it were my life. And the emissary went up surprisingly in his bid, and left me gasping. So that when Mildred came up to buy her furnishings, I could go with her in some semblance of security, and that was the sixth time I saw her and the last before she met me at the church.

XI

And after all I never told Blake, the man I loved best after Egerton Sims, that I was to be married; and the day even came and he had not been told. But having gone to New York to work out his play with Montresor, he stayed there, and even Mary could give me no more news. I have a theory she could not write him because she missed him, the vital presence of him, too much to say so in any form and even to keep from saying so if she once gave herself leave to write. I might have written him myself, but I was hammering away at Little Italy, feeding it into the hopper and snatching it out at the other end in rugs and chairs and curtains, mysterious lendings that Mildred came up to order, and that I believed in as a part of the ritual of the new worship. In that last interview she had said to me, something to my bewilderment, —

"We ought to decide where we are going to church."

"Oh!"

That was all I could say. I had gone devoutly in the

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island because Egerton Sims had assumed it as a part of the propriety of conduct, but I had an idea that I had laid it aside with other alien rigors of his dutiful life. They were garments that fitted him, not me. But as to Mildred and me, I had not thought of us as leaving our domestic paradise to go to church.

"Miss Harpinger," said she, "goes to Doctor Everest's."

Perfect as she was, I wished she would not quote Mary Harpinger. The woman was a blot, wilfully disfiguring the page of life. I could see she had gone on deepening her hue, making herself blacker and blacker all the useless days she lived.

"So," said Mildred, "I've seen more or less of the people. They're brainy, all of them, and very well placed. They've got money to spend, and they read. I think we'd better settle on them."

"You don't mean money to spend on my books," I said, in a foolish mirth, because even now I knew how unstable my beginnings of books seemed to me. But Mildred did not smile, and my joke immediately dwindled in my eyes.

"I really think," said she, "I think we'd better make up our minds to Doctor Everest's. And we'll be married there."

I had been born and grounded in the custom of the lover and his lass driving to the country minister to be married, with a casual witness drawn in from the kitchen or the barn. But this, I knew, argued me a

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groundling. I had no traditions of a dignified type, and if I could have bought it for her, Mildred should have been married in a cathedral under the blazon of stained glass. Though she had no kindred save the unfortunate Tom who had declined upon a colored person, I knew from innate certainty how perfect her traditions were. Therefore I humbly accepted my tryst with her at Doctor Everest's church, and when she told me by letter that two friends of Miss Harpinger, a man and a woman exceedingly well placed in Boston, were to stand up with us, I accepted that, too, though I should have liked Blake for my own best man. But Blake was hidden in the fastnesses of his poetic rapture there in New York, and I dared not summon him forth even by the bugle note to Mildred Lee's wedding. And all the other fellows of the Toasted Cheese, dear as they were, yet seemed more fitted to the tinkling calls of life, and after Blake, I might as well have an unknown as anybody. I did tell the boys, though late. I purposely made it late because I didn't want any healths drunk at the Cheese, any gay felicitations. This joy of mine seemed a secret and a solemn thing. I could have no profaning feet upon the pavement of my dream. But meeting Johnnie McCann in the street, two days before we went to church, I threw him the great news impulsively and asked him to tell the others. I need not have feared too loud a note of sympathetic joy. He looked at me as if I had struck him stiff and senseless. Then he muttered, "Good God!" apparently

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to himself, and hurried on, pursued, I made no doubt, by his old mania. I smiled at it then. I told myself Johnnie was a funny boy. But he and the others were funnier than I thought, or than they did, either; for the next day I got notice from a popular furnishing store that an oak sideboard had been bought for me and was awaiting my directions before being sent: "Compliments of the Toasted Cheese." I telegraphed this information to Mildred, my heart so soft over the fellows that I wanted to invite them to the ceremony. And Mildred telegraphed back: "Have price of sideboard put to your account. Wedding private. How could we invite them?" Well, how could we? I saw that at once, but I felt cold-hearted and shilly-shallying not to have treated the boys as well as they had treated me. I saw, too, her point about the sideboard. She had her sideboard, a rather magnificent antique affair that cost half a story, and she had but one dining room and two sideboards couldn't very well fight it out together there, since we must have place to eat. But I wouldn't turn the sideboard into my account. I loved it heartily because the boys had given it to me, and I went out and stealthily, I thought with a wry smile, hired a corner of a store-room in a warehouse and put my sideboard there. And so reminded of the unloosed ties of life, I wrote Mary a letter, warm as I could make it, and told her I was going to be married and she must meet my wife.

The night before my marriage whether I was in the

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body or not I did not know. I didn't smoke, usually. It was partly the reaction of Blake and Egerton Sims on what was still my imitative youth; but that night I sat by the window and watched the western sky and my pipe was by. The sky kept me company from rose and blood color to its virgin star, and it was all a symbol of what was soon to be. First the rose of our heaven-descended passion and then the stars, mysterious warders set to light our hope, the guardians of our blended life. For I knew this blush was but the splendor of the marriage eve. I knew the actual world was dark like night, and we two were to find our way through it together. Yet those heavenly warders would be always there. And the life in me became almost an anguish, it was so keen; for chiefly I was afraid, and it was all for her. How could I make her happy, this softest creature, this snow and fire and dew of womankind? how could I ease the path before her tender feet? how should I keep the outcry of the world from battling at her casement? I looked to myself a rough chap indeed to have essayed so brave a charge. What would she find me in a month or so of my blunt-witted levity? And then, driven by the wonder and sharp joy and pain of it all, I sat down at my table with no purpose save that the soul in me had to speak, and wrote it down: all I could catch of it from the heavenly voice that seemed to be dropping fears and longings into my heart, dropping them all over my room indeed, for they were like angels too heavily laden with blooth, so that the

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petals fell. And it was lyric, the falling of these petals, and it beat into lines, and I saw, with no interest because the laden angels were of so much vaster import than what I had been able to gather of their scattered store, that I was writing verse. And after I had put into it what I was able to gather in both hands of the blossom shower — the rose of the sky and the warder stars and my delight in the coming of the bride and my fear of her austere state and my vow that so far as I, her servitor, could guard it, her path should be made plain — I dropped my head on my arms on the table and slept there, and after a minute, it seemed, it was morning and this was my great day. And the rest of it passed like a dream, with a correct stranger standing at my side in the church, and the touch of Mildred's hand and her promising irrevocable things in her calm voice. And we drove to our own house and found luncheon set by the "accommodator" she had engaged to serve us until she had time to look about her and arrange her household. And there I found my bag, brought over from aunt Cely's that morning, and strangely that seemed to me the most incredible circumstance of all and the most final. Here were the last of my traps. I had sent the others before. The bag marked the line between the old life and this uncharted one. I had told aunt Cely where I was going, and why I had given up the room the week before, and she had put up her colossal arms and wrapped me in them. I dare say she would have

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kissed me if I had bent to it, but I wanted no kisses save from one.

"You are a good boy," said aunt Cely. "I know she's a good girl. What does she do?"

In Burke Street we all did something, man and woman. There were even a few laundresses at the less hopeful end of it, who carried home parcels in checked gingham to fortify husbands that took their sedentary recreation in the Common.

"She is a princess," said I, in the pride of my crowning.

"Well, well!" said aunt Cely. She always knew what you meant, even if you did speak in figures. Though she weighed two hundred and twelve, she had been born in Arcadia those sixty years ago. "Well, you tell her to be good to you."

"Tell me to be good to her," said I like lightning, and she was as ready.

"You will that. You're a good boy. Wait a second." She toiled back into the parlor and brought out a little cup of the three left from her old set. "Here," said she, "I wish 'twas more, but the other two are for John Blake and Mary some day. Bring your wife to see me. Tell her I'd come myself, but it's hard for me to get round."

So I had gone to my new home with the cup hung on one finger and some books in the other hand. The little cup moved me tremendously, thinking how good everybody had been to me always, and for no desert of

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mine. And that afternoon, when we had broken bread together, Mildred and I, at our own table, I brought out the little cup and told her how nice aunt Cely had been, and how we must go round to call on her in a day or two. I can see Mildred now sitting there in her perfect light gray dress, turning the cup in her delicate fingers.

"Lowestoft," she said.

Later, when the west was aflush again, I remembered the crumpled papers thrust into a book in that instant of leaving Burke Street, and took them out, looked at them, and they seemed something mine and yet partly strange to me. But it was hers, too, the half of it, nay, all, for the call of her spirit to mine had generated it and called the petals and the wings.

"Come here," I said. "I want to read you something." And I led her to the western window and drew her down beside me on the window-seat and kept my arm about her. I seemed to have grown very stern, like iron in my tenderness. I did not know the man I had become. And I read her all the long poem, and she listened in that stillness of hers that always seemed to be waiting and never to have adequate impulses of its own to break it. And as I read I wondered. It was not mine, I knew. It belonged to that upper air where the stars have ordered courses, and it kept an inevitable flow and rhythm such as I could not imagine altered. It was one of the things that are. You cannot change them. If you try, they fly back like a

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growing branch, bound down in its first spring vigor, to the curve its healthy cells have made. I finished, and I wondered what she would say.

"What do you call it?" she asked me, still in the clear voice that told no tales of her.

"Nothing. Yes, it's an epithalamium. That's all."

"Where are you going to send it?"

Send it? Then the answer came in a rush from my hot heart to my brain. This was the answer,—"I have sent it in reading it to you. I have sent it to the red heart beating under your white breast." But my lips could not utter that. They were sealed by my great fear.

XII

When I look back at the months after my marriage, I see chiefly a succession of days spent in the hardest work I had, up to that time, done. In moving into the house on a street above my worldly status, I had set in motion gigantic machinery that would not stop, and indeed had to be fed lest it should slacken. Life resolved itself into a demand for money. There were people below stairs, working very hard I was willing to believe, so that Mildred and I, in our pretty state at our polished table, could eat of the best, suitably served. There were other persons in an obscurity outside our vision, ransacking the earth for luscious fruits, making the coldest of storages for perishable products, killing

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animals that we might gather in enough proteids, keeping an unvarying temperature in greenhouses that we might have violets, and weaving and spinning and embroidering that our state should be clothed. And for all this intricate system of congested production I had to work, sometimes by night as well as by day, to find my just equivalent. When I flagged for a moment in invention — never in endurance, for I was very strong — even then I never thought of the possibility of being less at ease in the hostelry of the world. So far I had not thought longingly of the goods of the earth. I liked the crude abundance at aunt Cely's, also the honest dearth. When we had an ice sent in there, it had seemed like an enormous festival, like the snow brought from the mountains for Persian kings. But this sitting in the centre and letting the goods of the earth revolve past, stopping benignly for us to take a portion, always paying that toll I sometimes found it hard to satisfy, this seemed to me a monstrous ordered confusion, but something that had got to be kept up. I was still turning out my stories of Little Italy, and it was commonly said that I was astonishingly prolific. It was dull work, sometimes hateful work. I was following my recipe as exactly as a horse in a treadmill puts down his feet. The stories must be short, full of sentiment, tinged with optimism, and there should be that little snap of surprise at the end. I could do them with my eyes shut, and almost with my mind asleep. Mildred would say something to me across

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the coffee cups, something that either charmed or hurt me — she hurt me only when I felt we were hallooing to each other from different continents of foreign minds — and I could sometimes actually make two stories out of it, one of misunderstanding made miraculously plain and one of perfect understanding glorified. And in the middle of the winter I had grippe and my mind went to sleep, all but the vague trouble of feeling it was not at its post feeding the industrial hopper of the world; and when it woke up I heard a hated voice from the floor below giving orders as if it were much at home. Mildred was setting my medicine table in trim in the deft way she had, not a shade less tranquil for the extra burden she must have carried.

"Who's that?" I said.

The effort seemed to send me singing off in waves of ebbing nothingness.

She did not hesitate.

"Miss Harpinger," said she.

I tried again to speak, but words would not serve me, and I gave an unbridled sound comparable to the speech of the lower animals, and this, I suppose, was a groan. I thought I understood. I must have been ill for months. (It was only two weeks, but that I could not compass.) I thought she, the queen of my luxurious little kingdom greening on the edge of an abyss, had been terrified at seeing me, the purveyor of life, laid flat, and she had called in this raucous element of the world of money to stand by us in our need. It was

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pitiful to me, because so ineffably sweet of Mildred. For of course the labor of it all would come on her. To be that unfortunate and uncatalogued thing, a companion, was her only industry, her way of meeting the world, delicate child as she was. So she had taken the raw product which was Mary Harpinger, into what was the stillness of our expensive walls, to foster her and fulfil her outrageous claims. All the demands of Mary Harpinger seemed to me outrageous because I could not consider that the hateful fungus of her distorted will might easily be overlooked by a pity greater than mine, that saw how she was cut off by her disease from the normal attitude of life. I made a clutch at my own normal life then by resolving as definitely as so weak a thing could do, that the day I stood on my feet again Mary Harpinger should leave the house. So I shut my eyes and gave myself up to the healing and strengthening powers as far as I might, because this one domestic shock was enough to show me I must conserve my wasted force to the end of getting "fit." I ate prodigiously as soon as hunger came to me, and encouraged it and slept savagely, burrowing down into lethargy because, as I was now, my brain found no fecund impulses toward stories of Little Italy, even to the end of buying the weekly butter. And one day I felt much like myself, and got on my clothes with unaccustomed hands, and sat by the window feeling foolishly small.

"Any letters?" I asked.

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Mildred was covering my knees with the green and blue plaid cape I had once seen her wear in a rain at Romney, and it brought back the swelling love of that new time, when I scarcely dared look at her wet cheek for thinking what the touch of it would be in its fresh cool bloom. I took up her hand as it dropped the plaidie over me, and I kissed it, and thought she too must be knowing what my memory had been.

"Yes," said she, "there are letters. I opened them."

She brought them. There were business letters. One had held a check, and this she had deposited. That was right. There were two offers from magazines for stories. These I could not consider, because I was sold outright to Rees and Dresser. But there was one small envelope with an eccentric neat writing I knew. I felt the blood come into my cheeks. I felt like a lover. It was from Blake, and a part of me loved him more than almost anything on earth, in a certain way. I could almost smile, in a tender fashion, over this love of mine for Blake. It belonged to the side of me that saw literature a long way off, like an accomplished structure, a thing architecturally beautiful and strong to last, to which all the nations had brought their tribute, one a stone and another a frost-work of frieze. A warm wave of pleasure came over me. So he had known I was ill, and he had written me to say he was sorry. But the letter itself threw me into a wonder. It was no such curt, kind heartening as Blake might have written, the hail of man to man. It was a hot panegyric on some-

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thing I had done, full of flaming adjectives, laudations, extravagant, indeed, but tempered by what I could see he was sure was the justice of them. It was written with the measured beat of great prose, as if he felt the subject-matter demanded his finest periods, as if he could not, in the presence of perfection, chant its laudations in any but the purest measures. I felt myself exhilarated by it, upborne as on the angels with four wings to highest ether, and though I was conscious of having done nothing to deserve it, yet I felt beatifically conscious that I must have done something after all, since Blake must know. I read a phrase of it here and there to Mildred, who was putting the room in order as she had an accurate habit of doing. Her touch upon a room was like a pianist's upon keys, always to the end of harmony.

"Hear this," I said. "What does it mean? 'Nothing more exquisite since Keats.' 'Perhaps Keats himself never compassed that sense of the dewy beginnings, the march out of sunrise across the plain of day.' 'More love in it than anything but the one immortal lyric' — oh, what does he mean, what does he mean?"

She was standing by the table, putting jonquils into a vase, and she looked over at me, a jonquil in her hand. Standing there, her slim young figure against the gray-green of the wall, no line of emotion graven in her face, she was illusory as spring and as mysterious. That veil we call beauty, our wonder and our despair, was

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over her from the crown of her bright head to her perfect foot. Yet I did not know what she was thinking any more than I knew whether the spring itself was cognizant of worship. And perhaps from my weakness, I felt far away from her, and pity for us both that her soul, too, must go uncomprehended. When I was at my physical best, blood currents running free and some reckless abandon in me, this illusiveness of hers gave me a sense of something to attain. But now I was too weak to take even one conquering step toward her, and it saddened me. In my physical poverty I was clinging to her like a child, and I put out my querulous plaint to be illumined, reassured.

"Look here," I said. "Read this. What does he mean?"

"I've looked at it," said she, as if it were a matter of no moment. "It's the Epithalamium he means."

"I haven't written any —" There I stopped. Had the leaping flame of that pre-nuptial night somehow been caught, the flare of it only, by alien profane eyes? Even John Blake's, the very pulse of poetry, even his eyes were profane if they had seen those words, that were the trysting of my soul with hers. Had I, in the vagueness or even the delirium of this hateful illness, in some mad moment sent them to him?

"Mildred," I implored, "what does he mean?"

She had been running her duster over the polished table and then regarding it with righteous care to catch the maid in service slackly done. The little frown over

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her estimate smoothed momentarily, and she took up a magazine from the table and brought it to me as sufficient answer.

"Here," she said. She turned the leaves in her deft way whose every motion counted, and held it for me. There were black spots swimming before my eyes, but I could read the page. "An Epithalamium, by Martin Redfield." And then began the lines that had been so much a part of the sunset and the dark that I was like a fool surprised that type could echo them. I looked up at her, and the vision of her swam in confusion: for my eyes were full of tears. I was unspeakably humble before her. It was inconceivable to me that I could have done a thing like that, even in the madness of physical overthrow, and she still regard me with her unmoved favor.

"I didn't —" I began in miserable disclaimer. "Yes," I said, "I must have sent it, but I didn't know."

She shut the book with one of her serviceable, swift motions.

"Now," said she, "you must have your egg."

I had to go back to bed presently. The doctor came, and seemed to think me unreasonably tired. He asked if I had had any worry or a shock of some sort, and I said, "no."

I never answered that letter from John Blake. Even when I was on my feet and rather doggedly turning out more Little Italy, because we had fallen far behind in

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our expenses, even then I would not read the poem. The magazine lay there on the table until one day, when I was alone, I fell upon it and tore it with fury, a little ashamed of my passion and glad nobody saw me thrust it on the fire. And that afternoon Mildred came to me when I was sardonically inventing a sentimental turn to the end of a story, and asked: —

"Do you know where the *Torch Bearer* is? Miss Eliot wants to see your poem."

Miss Eliot was a tall, long-footed, erudite person of locally imperishable blood who was feeding upon lectures with a rounded certainty that they made the intellectual life, and came to share them with Miss Harpinger in sips. The only redeeming feature I had thus far seen in Miss Harpinger was her brutal scorn of Mattie Eliot, who, she said, was a fool that had got the idea books were invented yesterday.

"Do you know where it is?" Mildred asked. She was still searching.

"No," said I.

I made a surprised note of it as the first lie I had told her. My eyes were at that moment frowningly on the gray, slaty disorder of the burned paper in the grate, like a hornet's nest in ruins. I found myself smiling at the significance of that. Her eyes followed mine to the grate.

"You've been burning your papers!" said she. "Don't you think you'd better put them in the basket? When they're in the grate they blow so."

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"Yes," said I. "I'll put them in the basket after this."

That day it was, Mildred told me Miss Harpinger wanted to come to the table. Heretofore her meals had been served in her room, but she had an idea my conversation might be amusing, and she was willing to make the painful effort of getting down.

"I thought," said Mildred, "you could help O'Neil carry her."

O'Neil was the furnace man, a benevolent, smoky visitant. Even through the pipes I got his amazingly bad tobacco, and though I had kept him supplied with my own brand, he had accepted it as something well meant and kept on with his own choice.

"We can't do that," said I, in a hurry.

"Why can't you?" Mildred asked. "She'd appreciate it very much."

"O'Neil smells like the dickens," said I, being a coward. I was willing enough to put it on O'Neil. I'd have put it on Gabriel to keep Mary Harpinger out of the dining room.

"I told her so," Mildred said, "but she's very sweet about it. You'll have to be here about twenty minutes earlier than usual. That'll give you time to dress for dinner, and get her down in season. She'd really appreciate it very much."

Then I broke down and implored her not to let this thing be, not to make me see her waste her youth in tendance on that egotistical old shell of what had never

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been a human creature worth the saving. If she was doing it for compassion alone, as I believed, would she not shift her tenderness to me even if not to herself in conjunction with me? Mary Harpinger, the sound of her, the thought of her, was poisoning my home.

"Martin," said my wife, "wait a minute. She pays us twenty-five dollars a week."

It was true, then, this was my dear's sacrifice to the gods of home. I took her hands and kissed them.

"Mildred," I said, "if that's it, get her out to-morrow. I can plug twice as hard as I'm doing now. With the house to ourselves, I shall be another chap altogether. You can't tell her she's got to go. Let me tell her."

"No," said Mildred. Her face settled into a still sort of look it had at times, deeper than its daily calm. "No. We can't do that."

And we didn't do it for that winter, and next summer she went down with Mary Harpinger to Romney, and I stayed in the cool, lonesome city house, and went down for week ends only. And some week ends I didn't go at all. I said I had work to do, and Mildred never questioned whether it could have been deferred. The line had been effectively passed, since the day I gave her that first false No. It was easier, in domestic exigencies, to offer conventional reasons, and I was not long in learning that these were the only ones she ever expected. For a time I felt like a scoundrel, knowing she would not give such reasons to me. But by and by I began to see she did give me such reasons, and it shocked me out of

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all telling for a while. And then I accepted it as a part of the scheme of social life, a necessary interchange of courteous subterfuge.

I must go back to say that we had not been long married before I again told Mildred how aunt Cely would gladly call on her but for her poor feet, and proposed we should run round together straightway and see the house. It would be very pleasant, she said. Sometime we might. To-morrow night, I urged. Not to-morrow night. Miss Harpinger would need her. And though I proposed many a night as nights came, there was always one or another reason, and we never went. And toward spring I ran in alone, with a tardy remorseful courtesy, and spent an easeful two hours with aunt Cely, who professed herself as understanding perfectly how little time a young wife had.

"The house itself's enough," said aunt Cely, and then she went off into a disquisition on her increasing weight and the inadequacy of her poor feet. I saw she had a vision of Mildred cooking the chop for dinner and, head tied up in a towel, sweeping a floor. I left that picture undisturbed. I saw that the probabilities were against their ever meeting, and it gave me some ease to think of Mildred, in aunt Cely's eyes, too irrevocably bound to tasks to think of neighboring. But I did not see Mary. She was working at the library, aunt Cely said, verifying some difficult proof, the last being my version of her outspoken scorn that printers "spelled so." And Blake was in New York.

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He had been back but once since his going, and then he looked like a "shadder," and Mary, after sight of him, had looked as if she cried all night.

XIII

So Mary Harpinger went to Romney with my wife and I stayed at home in the house that felt very large and still and barren of warm pleasures. I had gone down two days before and looked at the rooms to see if they were really right, but Mildred had resisted my desire to be there at her coming and see her settled. It was very pretty of her, for, as I understood, it was because she knew how hateful Miss Harpinger was to me. I was partly grateful and also ruefully conscious of being, with no will of hers, under penance, and only when I found she was disposed to take one of the maids to unpack for her did I cease feeling remorse. I had learned that she was constantly thinking of me in an unerring, practical way, of my fitness for my work, of my conditions for doing it. She had done a good deal of exacting, steady drudgery herself, and she often gave me the feeling that I was a machine set to do certain tasks and to be oiled and kept in condition therefor.

It was a brilliant day when she went, with the lindens heavily sweet, and I walked moodily upstairs and sat down at my table where the ragged edge of a story pressed me to trim it into shape. And as I began with

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the mechanical precision of a brain that has been accustomed for a long time to working at one sort of task, I was conscious that I didn't want to do it at all. And my mind, which had not ceased clicking dutifully for all the months of my marriage, opened its mouth and yawned and stretched its arms and liked the freedom of it, and I sat and considered my life and could not even see the outline of those fake lives I was concocting. I felt as if I had been pent for a long time in some atmosphere foreign to me, and now was the hour to breathe another air. I thought back over my amazing success: how I, who had started on my journey a rough farm lad with no traditions save to be honest and clean, was living in a spacious, really a lordly house, so far as my deserts were concerned. I had a wife who walked and spoke and dressed like a princess, and I was her willing servitor. Not glad, not eager: nothing had broken the bonds of my olden rigor of behavior and feeling. There had never been for me, save that night before my marriage, such torches burning, such sharp scents and savors, such dreamlike worship. But I had found myself a citizen of a well-managed community. Everything in my house was done to the tune of a perfect accord with ordered life. We had excellent persons to dinner, and sometimes stupid ones. My wife had become acquainted with them in the church or through the offices of Mary Harpinger, who continued to be "well placed," and they were all of Mary Harpinger's choice. Sometimes I even fancied that the associates of Mary

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Harpinger's youth had done with her in her debased old age. Only the compassionate ones had time and eyes for her. I began by poking candid fun at these musty residents, and even proposed having in Johnnie McCann and some others of the Toasted Cheese to start a little leaven in their density. But Mildred gently implied that the Toasted Cheese would not do; and when I saw she regarded our heavy medium with entire seriousness, I ceased trying to lighten it for her. On Tuesdays she was "at home," and the same following dropped in. Once I did meet Johnnie McCann in the street and took him in with me to such a function; but when we had got fairly within the circle and he heard what they were talking about — personalities, mingled with retrospective European travel — Johnnie grew very red, wrung my hand, and hurried back into the hall. I followed him, suspecting mania, and found him halfway out of the door, shut into the crack indeed by the impulse of his conflicting desires to explain and yet escape.

"Ask her to excuse me," said Johnnie. I saw he meant Mildred. "I know that lot. Can't stand 'em. Seen 'em on the boat going down to Nahant. Heard 'em talk. I feel it coming on."

They had brought on his suicidal mania. That was more of a feat than I had ever seen within their reach. I used to wonder what was the matter with them, or what was the matter with me for not coalescing. Vain query. It went back every time to Mildred's rigorous

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censorship. She simply would not recognize new blood, and the really old blood she was privileged to worship only through society notes, was flowing another way, tides of it uniting to form the "swim." She was thrown back on pottering respectability, a motley "neither here nor there," save in its bank account and crusted axioms, and with an iron nerve made no complaint of its sad quality. I used to tell Mildred she never knew when folks were dull. It seemed an adorable nescience in her, sprung, of course, from kindliness. I had an idea there were charming folk about us, if we could know them for the unconventional asking. I met men down town that looked to me the best kind of good fellows; but their wives doubtless had their own system of exclusion and wouldn't know Mildred, and I was too busy to build up acquaintanceship away from home. But I did wish Mildred could have taken in the Toasted Cheese. Johnnie never came again, and I had no time to hunt out the fellows in concourse. As the phrase goes they — the dear fellows of the other time — dropped out of my life. My own intercourse with the familiars of my house sometimes made a nervous sweat break out over me, and again roused me to a murderous irritation. I would come down early from my study because Mildred asked me to be there, and find her in a gown of diaphanous simplicity, pouring tea and looking with her limpid candor into the eyes of some high-born tortoise, and Mary Harpinger in her wheeled chair a little apart receiving

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the court of gossip from men and women who had a community of feeling from having been born in the same habitat with the same armor of prejudice. And as soon as I entered the circle about my wife I began to be pelted with tribute: stereotyped compliments on my stories of Little Italy, queries about what I was doing now, and imperative mandates that I should never do anything but "dialect." At first I was bewildered and much flattered, I who had never expected to be in the centre of any concerted admiration. Then I began to be a little irritated, being forbidden to write in any style but the one that earned my costly bread, and I set about to see why these people would swallow what they called dialect stories with a mild placidity while they even resented the same passions put under the skin of persons of their own ilk. Was it because my "dialect" stories had the simplicity of nature? They had nothing of the sort. They were hidebound sophisticated guesses at the pabulum the monied public was bound to like. But if ever I tried a story of the folk I saw at afternoon teas, even if I liberated the creatures and tried to infuse into them the blood of common life, my public would have none of it. I had spent a good many vagrant minutes in wondering why, and I had come to the conclusion that they resented emotion put into the mouths and hearts of men and women outwardly like themselves. It made them shamefaced. You couldn't tuck in a sly flip of humor at them; they resented it. But thrust their own emo-

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tion under a workman's blouse, and they thought it very pretty indeed, or very moving.

Now that I was left alone, should I write what I wanted to? And what did I want to write? Not verse. Not a full stanza had beaten into my sluggish brain since the night the Epithalamium had woven its web to the sound of wings. That feat I accounted a miracle. Poesy was too shining a bird for me to dare recapture her. The sheen on her breast and wings would have scorched me. But I did hear her sometimes overhead, flying otherwhere, I knew, and my heart stopped beating until she passed. Sometimes on a clearest morning, when the city streets were lucent with the breath of dawn, she would toss me a word, a phrase, and I would "catch" in a rapt expectancy. But it was never any more. The highest lot of all was not for me.

After I had sat at my table for a comforting time and mused and wondered in the way of the introspective whether I was dumb at the loss of Mildred or only relieved at the wider space now Mary Harpinger had gone, I suddenly got up without volition and went round to Burke Street and rang the bell. The late afternoon was very tranquil and sweet, and the dust of traffic at the foot of the hill transmuted the sunset light in the river to a glow of faerie. I had a sense of anticipation upon me, the sort that comes in earlier youth than mine then was, of something approaching, something to augment or assuage the ache of years and

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so to be wondered at in its advance. The door opened to me at once, as if some one had seen my coming. Aunt Cely stood there, her adipose bulk quivering, her pink cheeks wet from an excess of tears.

"Go right up," said she. "Mary's with him. She's been there all night and all day. Maybe you can make her lay down and get a mite o' sleep."

I made no doubt it was Blake she meant, but starting up the stairs I stopped, caught by the look of the hall. Bare enough before, it was dismantled.

"You're not moving?" I said.

She nodded speechlessly. But as it was evident I couldn't stop to question, she called after me that she'd always meant to give up the house when she could afford it, and "board." But, she cried, it had come at the wrong time. It was turning him out. I ran up the stairs fast yet as softly as I could, not knowing what I should find, to John Blake's room. There was no sound. At the open door I paused. Blake, dressed, lay on the outside of the bed, and Mary knelt beside him. Her arm was under his neck, and his face, like the face of a dead man, had sunk against her shoulder. Anything like the extreme and terrible meaning of those faces I had never seen. Blake's was like death itself, a piercing mask of sorrowful death, death by starvation of soul or heart. The sweetness of the relaxed mouth, the pathos of the closed lids, the wan hollows where grief had pinched her little marks, — these had made John Blake's face such as I had never

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seen it. If I had not known him, if I had come upon the face in wax or clay, I should have said it was that of one rejected by a world he loved, the poet rebuffed, even the Redeemer crucified. And Mary's face — there was but one name for it: the Mother of Sorrows, the immemorial type of compassionate grief, of one who loves with all her being and sees what she loves dying before her and is denied the supreme solace of herself dying for what she loves. My glance upon them drew her eyelids up. She had not "lost herself." She was watching. Her mouth smiled a little upon me and her pupils widened, but she did not move. I understood. She had a faint, unconfirmed hope that Blake might be asleep.

XIV

I SAT there with Mary and watched. She paid no more attention to me, but our community of vigil was welcome to her. That I knew. And after so long a time that I felt sympathetically the cramp in my own shoulder, knowing how she had held him in a fostering she would not share, he did really sleep, and then she cleverly slipped away her arm, and gave him to his pillow. I rose, and as softly she preceded me. We went down the stairs, and Mary led me into her own room. There where she could break without likelihood of his hearing her, she did get hurriedly into a chair, and put her hand for a moment to her face.

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How wan she was! It did not need the trembling of her dear mouth to show me how long and deeply she had felt the stress that had culminated in this vigil; but I was full of anxiety to know.

"Mary," said I, "what is it?"

This recalled her to the needs of life. Mary had no time for tears. She wiped her face in a practical way, and answered me rather dully,—

"He's broken down, that's all."

"Overwork?"

"No!" She spoke hotly, as if the mother in her raged at the wrong done her young. "No. Trouble. Work never hurt John Blake yet. Work is his life."

This was pretty stiff for Mary, who had no habit of intemperate speech. For so calm a creature, calm by habit and the requirements of the day, she was beside herself.

"Tell me, Mary," said I.

She began the recital dispassionately. Montresor had virtually taken the play. Blake had gone on to New York, as I knew, to watch the rehearsals, to act, as he innocently thought, as interpreter to Montresor's conception of the part. Montresor hadn't been able to say enough about the play. It was "great," the best thing written in a century. He challenged nothing at the start, verse, construction, nothing whatever. But the minute he began to rehearse, he challenged everything. Blake was not a fool, though a poet. Something of this he had expected. Montresor had a

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knowledge he hadn't. It would have been incredible if the written word had borne the test of the spoken one. Yes, he had expected to tinker his play, had gone on to New York really to do it. But he was not to tinker it after his own concept. Montresor was to dictate to the last phrase. And Montresor, who seemed a boyish enthusiast as he flashed a telegram of praise, in action proved to be more or less of an ass, every kind of an ass. He not only looked upon himself solemnly as the be-all and end-all of the drama, — he might have stopped there, and you could have stomached him, — but he had no humility before other forms of art. He would march with ruthless buskin into Blake's own field, and tell him what to weed and where to plant the flowers of rhetoric. And Blake had been patient, raging inwardly, but patient, Mary was sure, counselling himself to respect a temperament unlike his own. But every day it grew on him more and more indubitably that Montresor was an ass, so that he shuddered to think of his play in those profane hands at all; and on that came the climax.

"He wanted," said Mary, her face hot now and her voice again raging, "Montresor wanted the end changed. He found out he wasn't getting enough of a part. You know how the play ends. The poet lives. Everybody lives, just as they do in life." Here Mary was a little sweeping, but I knew what she meant. "Mr. Blake never talked about it to me. But I copied it." There was the anguish of an old hurt here. Mary was never

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invited into the happy garden of Blake's toil. She had to filch little twigs of his achievement over the wall between them. What that cost her, only Mary knew. "Any way, Montresor'd got to die all over the stage. My God!" For Mary to call upon her God, a strictly esoteric deity locked into some secret shrine within her, showed how far she had strayed outside her equable frame of mind.

"Well?" said I.

She was listening for a sound from Blake, and had to be reminded to go on.

"That's all," said she, resuming her impassive voice. "Mr. Blake took the play away from him. From what we knew of Mr. Blake, I guess he damned him well. Then he came back, came home, and got on to his bed and stayed there like a dead man — as he is now."

I was so young, so strong with all kinds of strength, that to me the thing seemed impossible. I essayed a prosaic comfort.

"Well," said I, "it's outrageous, but he'll get over it. He'll sleep it off."

"He hasn't slept for five days and four nights," said Mary.

"He's sleeping now."

"That's bromide."

"Have you called a doctor?"

"Oh, yes."

"What does he say?"

"Says he must have had a shock — and that on the

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top of overwork and underfeeding — oh, yes, he's had a shock all right."

My first thought was of money, but I hardly dared say so. Blake was the last man to have saved a dollar. Mary would have hoarded in anticipation of his need, but she must not be allowed to open her too-worn purse. But I put that aside to ask:—

"Is he going to stay on here?"

"No," said Mary. "He can't. Aunt Cely's moving. Besides, he's ordered away, into the country. He's to go as soon as he can pull himself together and get a little sleep. The doctor said sanitarium, and he refused. You've heard his No. There's nothing to be said after that."

"No, you can't stay here," I said, remembering aunt Cely in the hall.

"No," said Mary, indifferently it seemed, but really because she had thought so much over the situation that she was numb to it. "I moved last week. I can give him my room and find another place. But he'd die there of the heat."

Then the thought came to me. It was so natural, so welcome to me that I wondered I hadn't spoken at first seeing her the words I said now.

"You must come to me — both of you."

Mary looked unfeignedly shocked, touched then, as if she thanked me for my part in it, though not seeing how it could be accepted.

"Oh, no," said she, "we couldn't do that."

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"I'm all alone," I assured her. "We'll get a cook."

Mary brightened. I saw the look leap into her eyes. So I was alone? It seemed feasible.

"My wife will be delighted," I hastened to say, perhaps a little stiffly, because I saw Mary had doubted my wife.

"Thank you," said Mary. "We'll come. But you don't need a cook. It's my vacation. I can do for us."

And at dusk I sent a carriage, and Blake, wondering apparently why he was so weak and was being guided hand and foot, came up my steps leaning on Mary's arm, and I was a proud and happy man to have used my house to such purpose. I had not yielded to Mary's protest that she could do it all. Our Lydia, who came back that day for the last consignment of her clothes, before betaking herself to the shore, proved unexpectedly dazzled by the wage I offered her and consented to see me through, a part of the way at least. Mildred had never liked Lydia. She said the girl had no idea of her place, and she should not take her back in the autumn. But Lydia, though a little satirical in her manner of looking out of her pale eyes and under her coarse red hair, suited me very well, and I was thankful for her. She had asked whether Mrs. Redfield meant to come back, and when I said No, it was then she consented.

Blake was put to bed in a still, dark room with the wistaria waving at the window, and he looked about

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him wonderingly and said but these words, — "The Pilgrim Chamber." Of Mary and me he took no notice at all. We were so familiar to him from older times, that I believe we only made a part of his blurred vistas. The human creature was ever little to him save in its heroic aspect of playing a part set down for it in his embroidered words.

That night I wrote to Mildred, a warm letter, full of the human tenderness these two saddened ones had started up in me, and including her in the magic circle of our community of help. It was wonderful to me to have a house and comforting drinks and a Lydia to share with these dear people. It quite waked me out of my pen-driving somnolence. The house was Mildred's and mine, and together we were giving it. So I told her.

Next day Blake waked to some realizing of his situation topographically, though his condition he would not accept. "Ridiculous!" he called it, but was too weak to get up, too weak to laugh, as he would scornfully have liked to do. I believe when he was confronted with his breakfast on a tray, and felt unequal even to that, he cried a little on Mary's shoulder, this to his own unmeasured horror. But he ate the breakfast in bits, doggedly, to prevent Mary's feeding him.

About ten o'clock I went into the room and found him lying flat, eyes closed, and Mary sitting by him in a perfect stillness that seemed a device of hers for making herself invisible. It was all yearningly benig-

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nant, yet so humble, as if she were quite sure she would have to be forgiven in the end for being there. Blake opened his eyes and saw me.

"You're a brick," he said. "This is incredible, impossible. I shall be on my feet in a day or two."

"Yes," said I, in the accepted way of meeting an invalid's unsupported hopes, "in a day or two."

Mary looked at me with the pleading eyes of some uncomprehended animal.

"Don't you think," said she, "when he goes — into the country, I mean — I could go too — to see to him?"

"Stuff!" said Blake. He had to condense meanings. He was too weak to amplify them.

"I've got to see to him," said Mary, angrily. She was half crying. I knew she had no regard for the speech of men. In her working world she thought she lived outside it, in a simpler, kinder place. But though Blake, too, lived outside, I knew he would not suffer this, and so said nothing. I was right.

"You can't go travelling round with fascinating young chaps like me," he said. "You can't, dear girl. I'll pull out somehow. Besides, what could you do for me?"

"I could do everything," said Mary, still angrily. She was terrified, I saw, afraid of his downhill course if she left him to himself. What should a long-legged chap like him, with his soul in his brains, in sunsets and rhymes and mythic tragedy, know about milk and eggs

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and so many naps a day, Nature's humiliating poultice after she has been defied?

"You can't do it," said Blake, as if he were dizzy and clutching at the words as the wheel went round. "You can't travel with foundered chaps unless you're married."

"I'd do that," said Mary, humbly. "I'd marry you."

I protest she spoke it as she could have spoken to no man in health: only to one gone back by reason of his weakness to the state of infancy. I have since learned that in this sickness of his she never expected Blake to recover. Or, at least, she fancied his mind would not come fully back. Besides, she craved the supreme delight of tending him. To me, so simply were the words said, that they brought no shock, no uneasiness because I was there. I simply looked to see how Blake would take them. He had shut his eyes, but he muttered the same word twice: "Sacrilege! Sacrilege!" And then something, a familiar sound perhaps, a step I knew, an aura I had learned to recognize, made me look up. And there in the doorway I saw Mildred. My first thought was that she must be prevented from coming in. She would hardly guess, even from his looks, how little Blake could bear, and there must be no greetings and no commonplaces. There she stood an instant in her gray dress, her hat with the long white veil, a diaphanous, almost a bride-like figure, looking, as she always did to me, as if she brought the spring. Her face, in its fine pallor, had nothing of the joyousness of spring;

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but she belonged, I always thought, to the first pale days before the buds half know the sun will love them. Mary saw her, following my eyes, and started. I got up and hurried out. I took Mildred's hand and drew her away with me and shut the door. And then, we two in the hall alone together, I felt there must be passionate endearment born of my surprise at least, and I put my arms about her and kissed her, first on her cool, velvet cheek, and then on her curving lips. And they, too, were cool. And suddenly, from the unexpectedness of her coming and the warm memory of Mary's unthinking love for Blake, I found myself urging, "Love me a little, Mildred. Love me." It was the first time I had ever put into thought even a reproach lest she did not love me, and as I spoke, the words surprised me. But Mildred had not heard them at all, or if she did, she regarded them absently, as she accepted my caress. She it was who led me now, into our room, and there she unpinned her hat and drew off her gloves with the extreme nicety that always marked her. To my eyes she seemed to be thinking something over, as if she had it to say and had not yet determined upon the discreet or tactful way of saying it. As for me, I felt absurdly, awkwardly like a lover who does not know his own deserts.

"Are those the people?" she said at last. And yet she had met Blake in that other spring.

"Didn't you get my letter?" I asked.

"Yes. I got it this morning."

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"Well, then, you know, dear," I reminded her. "I wrote you. It's Blake and Mary. You know Blake."

"What is the woman's last name?" she inquired.

I thought an instant and then laughed out. I really had forgotten Mary's last name. She had been Mary to all of us.

"By George, I don't know," said I. Mildred looked at me in a small, frigid doubt. But she waived that for more immediate issues.

"Of course they can't stay here," she remarked. "You'll have to tell them."

"Not stay here?"

I felt my heart beating to suffocation. "For the present surely. In this empty house?"

Mildred looked at me in a kindly tolerance.

"It isn't right, you know," she said. "It isn't decent."

The last word hit me hard. I felt it hurting Mary, though she didn't hear it. But I tried to get hold of myself.

"The circumstances are peculiar," I said. "Blake may not be at the point of death, but he's in the clutch of the kind of death he'd fear most: the only kind he'd fear. He hasn't lost his reason, but he's lost the power of using it. And Mary — she's an angel."

"Will you tell them?" said Mildred, with her strange patience.

I forgot that she was Mildred. It was not that Blake was dearer to me, or that Mary was; only I saw such

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ineffable helplessness and its guardian goodness so coldly menaced.

"No," I said. "I shan't tell them."

"Very well," said Mildred. She rose, and again appeared to consider how she should do it. "Then I will."

Before I knew any more than she what I was about to do, I got up and stood with my back to the door, thus facing her.

"No, Mildred," said I, "you mustn't tell them."

A faint surprise came into her face, some wondering respect for me, too, I have thought since.

"Why not?" she inquired, the same slight curiosity in her voice.

"Because I shan't allow it."

This was no male assertiveness. It was only the simplest statement of the things I felt it impossible to disclose: they were such big things, so much bigger than I, — the greatness of Blake's need, the magnificence of Mary. Mildred came moving toward me with her usual slow grace.

"Nonsense," she said. "Of course I shall be considerate. The woman will understand. I dare say she is all right. She simply doesn't know."

But I stood immovably at the door. I had no pride in the situation or my potential mastery of it. I merely felt ridiculous; and yet knew I could not yield.

"I shall have to ask you," said Mildred, "to stand aside and let me pass."

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I did not answer her, nor did I move. I seemed able to do neither the one nor the other. She sat down, now in a chair nearer me, and looked at me, still thoughtfully.

"You said Lydia was here," she remarked.

"Yes."

"I can't allow Lydia to stay. She understood perfectly she wasn't coming back."

"It's an emergency," I pleaded. I was glad to plead with her for anything. "Lydia sees it is. She'll be a perfect trump. You see if she isn't."

Mildred turned and looked at the clock.

"I have to take the two-thirty," she said. "Miss Harpinger is very nervous to-day."

I frankly damned Miss Harpinger, and was glad to relieve my feelings thus impersonally. Mildred rose again.

"No," she said, "I won't dismiss Lydia. But I'll ask her to give me some lunch."

And again I knew I could not let her go, untrammelled by my commands, outside that door. I laughed, and wished I were a better actor.

"Mildred," said I, "it's ridiculous, but I'm going to ask you to let me take you out to lunch."

She looked at me for a full minute, always thoughtfully, and then she said this extraordinary thing, —

"I am to be confined in the fall."

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XV

Was ever bright gift so strangely alloyed by the manner of bestowal? It was almost as if the motherhood in her misprized the value of what it had to give. Instantly I was at her side, on my knees there, my arms about her. All the passion of my nature surged into one deep channel: worship of that ineffable creature set aside by mystic consecration from the sordidness of life — the mother. She looked at me calmly and rather particularly, and I had suddenly an absurd idea that she wished I would take my arms away because the day was growing warm. Such eerie thoughts had got into the way of jumping into my mind like ill-intentioned sprites. I had to keep batting them on the head and tossing them away as reason and good taste should counsel. I kept my arms about her, and as in that day when they had found her first, I said her name. All the wonder I had felt that other spring gushed up, a fount of adoration. I felt again exultant passion, but passion mixed with a new mystic worship. Suddenly she smiled at me a little, and then my happiness was sealed. Mildred seldom laughed, indeed, perhaps never with an abandoned will, but her smile was nicely pretty.

"Now will you let me speak to the woman?" she inquired. It was almost as if she had said, "Now I have given you something very nice, do you mean to pay?"

I did not think that at the time, though somehow

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the words hurt me. I took my arms away — not untenderly. Could I ever be untender to a gift-bearer such as this? I looked at my watch.

"We'll have a carriage," I said. "And a glorious lunch. Will that suit you — " I wanted to add, "Little Mother?" But I did not dare.

She yielded definitely. I fancy she had come up against something in me she did not suspect, and had need to think it over.

"Very well," said she.

So she put on her hat again, and I took mine in passing, and we went out together to the carriage stand at the corner, I very loving of her and wondering in my tumultuous heart how I could show her that I had not meant to coerce her and that it was hateful to me. I knew I had only forced her to the way she would have taken if she had understood Blake's need and Mary's.

We had a good little lunch in a secluded corner, and talked much as two familiar friends might have done. But my eyes were ever on her face, in their new worship, though this she did not seem to know.

"I'm going down to Romney with you," I said, when we were again in the carriage and on our way to the train.

"No," said she definitely, "you mustn't do that. Besides, Miss Harpinger would be distressed if she thought I'd got to give up any more time."

Again I cordially cursed Miss Harpinger, and inquired, with all gentleness, because I now knew that

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I must be gentle to her forevermore, whether she wouldn't tell Miss Harpinger at once that last winter's arrangement couldn't possibly continue. Let her begin now and make her plans for the autumn.

"I couldn't do that," said Mildred, definitively. "What she pays in makes a serious difference to us. I don't know how we could get along without it."

"I can settle my own bills," I said, rather roughly, "and yours, too. I can work harder than I'm working now, Mildred. I feel as if I could work twenty-four hours in the day."

"I sometimes think you don't get the prices you might," said Mildred, thoughtfully. "I don't believe you question what they offer. Now when I sold the Epithalamium, I plainly sent them back their check and told them it was not enough."

My heart began to thump.

"The Epithalamium?" I said. "What did you have to do with it?"

We were almost at the station gate and she had more to say. So I suppose she answered hurriedly and carelessly, to put the topic by.

"Why, I had everything to do with it. You were sick, and I came on it in my drawer and sent it, and I got the check for it and made them double it. You could do that, time after time. Your name would stand it."

My heart, I thought, had stopped, like a misused watch. But I could not believe what it seemed I must

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believe. I had accepted my publishing of the Epithalamium as among the sorry inexplicable things of life; and since I must have done it in the coming delirium of my illness, I was not to blame. It was simply an ill, unchancy deed. But that the bride to whose white consciousness it should have been the gift of prophetic opening of gates that the queen of innocence and beauty might pass through — this I could not believe. Yet I must accept it, for she herself told me it was true.

"You mustn't work too hard," she was saying now.

"No." I took her slim, gloved hand, moved by her thought of me.

"It just defeats itself, overwork," she said. "You give out, and its worse in the end. Martin" — the carriage was drawing up, and she regarded me quite earnestly, "is your life insured?"

I knew what she was thinking: of the child and his pathetic, hungry little needs.

"Yes," I said. "I carry rather a heavy insurance. I thought I'd told you. I'll double it, though. Don't fear, darling. We'll make him safe."

Then I went with her to the train, holding her hand all the way, quite confident that the universe itself must know we were lovers, and again she refused to have me go with her. But just as I was leaving her she said in a practical way she had, as if the thing didn't matter much, but nevertheless she would undertake to carry it out, —

"I shall be up again on Tuesday. I've some shop-

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ping to do. Your friends will be gone then, won't they?"

Well, I didn't mean to see that they were gone, but how could I tell her so, with that roseate dawn about us? Instead I bent over and whispered the words in her ear, — "Little Mother," and then I left her.

I made speed home, for I did not know how self-possessed Mary would be in my absence, nor whether she would order food. But Lydia had served lunch, it was well over, and Blake was by himself and Mary waiting for me in the big room below. It went the length of the house, and Mildred, who never erred in taste, had kept it in gray and green, and in winter warmed it with blazing logs and flowers. But now it was a cool retreat, to the eye as to the feeling, and when Mary got up from the deep couch in the darkest corner and came forward to meet me, I felt she ought to look more comfortable than she did. She had got back her air of accuracy and crispness in her freshened business suit. In her shirt waist and linen skirt she might that moment have been going to her day's work; yet she was not out of keeping with the beautiful simplicity of the room. Mary carried her own atmosphere, and it was ever a noble one. I gave her hand a pat, and we went in and sat down in that darkest corner. But I saw her face was worried. It had lost its acute anticipative premonition when I had taken her home here and assured her that all was well. Now her dear brows were knitted again and her mouth had its lonesome curve.

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But she smiled at me. Mary never let it be seen if she was down. She began at once to reassure me, as she thought.

"I've telephoned Ellen Tracy."

I didn't know who she was, and Mary, seeing that, went on: —

"You've heard of Ellen Tracy. She's got loads of money, and she keeps vacation homes for — well, for folks like me." Mary looked at me with her brave smile that waved its banner and shouted at you that she was poor in the world's goods, knew she always should be poor, and you might as well classify her.

"There's nobody like you, Mary," I said, seizing upon the most obvious part of her speech.

"Not exactly," said Mary. "Praise be. But Ellen Tracy has started three homes in three different places, and there's a vacancy at her own big house at Hopeful Sands. So I'm going to take Mr. Blake there to-morrow."

I was relieved, of course. But I was also unreasonably disappointed. Here was my house — Mildred's and mine — here were Blake and Mary in their need. I had meant to be selfishly happy as a king, endowing them with all that was mine. Mary read my face. She got up and came to me. She took my hand and kissed it, thanking me in the quick little caress for loving Blake as I did and for wanting to give what she wouldn't let him take. She betrayed no hint of having seen Mildred in the doorway. She never spoke of that.

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Yet I knew. And this was why, in the extremity of their need, she was flying off to Ellen Tracy.

"I know," said Mary. "It's dear of you. And it's a wonderful house. Nothing could be better, except the country, of course. You see that's it. Mr. Blake must be got into the country."

And then we settled down to talk about Blake. Didn't she think, I asked, that a few weeks would set him up and he'd be his old self? Mary was afraid not.

"But what the mischief does it mean," I said, "for a man of Blake's inches to give out like a sick girl because he's had a disappointment? He's simply found out that Montresor's an egotistical dolt."

"Ah yes, you might think so," said Mary. "But he'd been overworking for a couple of years at least. He's a perfect child about his food — "

Yes, I agreed, Blake always seemed rather bored when he was called upon to eat. Felt queer, and when you reminded him it was lunch time, thought lunch was a superfluity.

"Yes. And living alone in New York without aunt Cely or me to spudge him up, think what it must be. And then, you see, when the crash came, he was just down enough to believe it meant he hadn't made good. Montresor — that great big Moloch of a matinée idol, with his valet and his dinners — well, Montresor just dominated him then and made him think what he pleased. Montresor wanted to get out of the play, and he said it was no good and Mr. Blake believed him."

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"Believed him," I repeated stupidly. "Believed he hadn't made good. Believed he never could. For all the best of him was in that play and if that was rot —"

"Yes," she concluded, in answer to my look. "That was what Montresor said."

So we sat silent, Mary and I, and considered, each on a separate road, what could be done to get back the soul of a man after it had been mishandled. But the roads met presently.

"Shall you stay down there?" I asked.

"A while," said Mary. "I was just thinking that. He could be made to believe I was going anyway for my vacation."

Then I asked a stupid question, but I protest I did not at the moment remember just what had called forth the word I had in mind. I could only hear Blake saying it.

"What did he mean, Mary, by saying 'Sacrilege, sacrilege,' that time?"

And at once I remembered, and would have recalled my question if I could. Mary met it bravely.

"Why," said she, "he meant marrying me. That would be sacrilege because he doesn't love me. Mr. Blake is very religious about those things. And of course," said Mary, simply, "it would be sacrilege. But if he was to die or lose his mind or give out so he couldn't earn anything, why, I shouldn't care about that. I should be on hand, that's all."

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Mary had no elastic ideas of right and wrong, but some things looked very big to her, and others, such as her own desert, very small. She sat gazing at me in such simplicity of devotion and worried reflection over Blake that I could not tell her what I thought of it all. There was nothing so simple in its beneficence as Mary, nothing save the bounty of the earth. But that has to be wrung out of the earth, which is as ready to be cruel as kind. And you had only to look a normal wish for Mary to wonder whether she could get it for you. It made the old planet seem warm and sweet, that and what I had just so strangely heard. It was, I thought, a beautiful world, and my heart said to me with a voice of its own, a voice I had never quite imagined until now, "Little Mother."

XVI

In two days more we went down to Hopeful Sands, Blake wanly distrusting the scheme, but yielding to us because he had lost all his old assertion, and we, I suppose, seemed too crudely strong for him. Hopeful Sands had not been discovered by the philistines. When they did discover it at last, Ellen Tracy had bought up the entire island and was safe. That is not so rapacious as it sounds. She would never have wanted privilege. Only she did work very hard to safeguard the solitude and birds and greenery that were to make a heaven for her vacation houses. Hopeful Sands,

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though it did not look it at first glimpse, was an island; but it was joined now to the mainland by a willow-embowered causeway never flooded except in spring, but wet at high tide. When you had passed the causeway, you fell into a marvellous undergrowth of alder, button-bush, azalea, all the beauties the wild world throws out to tangle our hearts — nay, for the wild world thinks nothing of us at all. It breathes, and drinks in water and sun, and the atoms move, and there is beauty.

The day was hot when we went down, and at the far end of the causeway a phaeton met us. Blake was tired from the trip, but even he waked slightly to the vividness of all this bourgeoning, and I could see his nostrils tremble with the fragrance of azalea and warm pine. It was a short drive through a winding way, always bosky, and suddenly we came out on velvet turf and a gray, gambrel-roofed house rich with carmine roses, and in the doorway, under the shade of the white pillared porch, Ellen Tracy stood awaiting us. I had, on seeing her, the strangest sensation, one I cannot now describe. I can only say even to myself, that it was as if I had known her before, and in finding her, it was as if I had just come home. She was rather a tall woman, with dark hair, soft and with shadows deeper than its blackness, parted and made into a knot of an old simplicity. Her features were delicately drawn, yet noble, her mouth was large, and her smile beautiful. She had a majestic way of carrying herself, a wonderful trick of holding her head, — I found myself repeating,

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"a neck like a tower," — and yet in all this panoply of womanliness, she was, I had to remind myself, just a girl. Ellen Tracy was young, but she was enabled to take her own way through the lone pathways of her lovingness to mankind by the aura of something emotionally mature. I was in a state of tense feeling that had not gone down in me since Mildred had brought me her gift, and quite naturally, it seemed, as it does in dreams, when we traversed the lovely pathway to the lovely house, I saw, for an instant, Ellen Tracy with my child in her arms. And yet perhaps it was not my child. Perhaps it was the symbol of the eternal child, the perpetually expected and beloved that my heart placed next her heart to be cherished there. She wore a white dress made with the greatest simplicity, and about the neck was a fine chain of gold. I suddenly wondered what Mary was thinking, and I turned to see. Mary had for the moment forgotten Blake. She was leaning forward, her lips parted, a shade more of color in her cheeks, and through the lips her breath came fast. But as we neared and drew up at the steps, the spell broke. Ellen Tracy did not seem less beautiful, only entirely human. She smiled at us in a welcome that warmed us, and came down a step to give her hand to Mary and then to me. Of Blake she took not the slightest notice beyond the one quick glance that told her he was the patient and now sore spent. A maid came, and a man to take up the trunks that were behind us in a cart, and Ellen Tracy herself carried off Blake and

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Mary to their rooms, leaving me in the cool, sweet house, furnished with such simplicity in colonial lines, with panels and fireplaces and all the reverenced reminders of an olden time that I seemed to be sinking happily back into the company of my forbears. I had a time-table with me, and I meant to take the next train back, walking over the causeway to the station, to give no trouble. I wandered about the darkened room, picking up a book here and there. Of books there were plenty, selected, as I began presently to guess, to fit all complexions of mind rather than one catholic taste. There was the Golden Treasury, a pile of anthologies, and in a set of shelves between windows, set where light would fall on them invitingly, novels, the oldest and the newest aspirant. There was a case of fairy tales, and modestly on a more secluded wall, history and the poets. It looked very much as if the one who had selected this store were saying to the reader, with some diffidence, "Don't feel obliged to be academic. Here are the stories. Take a bite. But if you're really hungry for something else, why, just go and look for yourself." And this was Ellen Tracy's fixed and even passionate determination: that her house was not her own but an inn to be arranged for the ease of guests. As this dawned on me more and more, she came, and seeing that I had but waited to take leave of her, she said to me at once: —

"You'll stay to luncheon. There's a good train about five, the cool of the day."

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I ought to have been busy at home earning bread for my little son — from the first moment I knew he was to be a son — and buying Mildred's release from Miss Harpinger, but I wanted so immeasurably to stay that I made no question of it. I could work that night with a pen quickened by this richness of new circumstance to spur it on.

"Come out here," she said.

She opened a door to a vine-shaded veranda, and there beyond were trees and trees and promise of bosky coverts, and, not the sea, but still water like a river at full flood. She took my silence for the pleasure it was, and smiled.

"We have breakfast out here," she said. "We almost live here. Now, Mr. Redfield, won't you tell me about your friends?"

We were in wicker chairs by the rail, turned slightly to face each other, and I considered what I could tell. Her eyes, full of a sweet seriousness, questioned mine. I understood her perfectly. She wanted no confidential gossip over their needs, to classify them in a physician's officious usage. No, she wanted only a hint that should help her own hospitality to offer and not to urge.

"What did Mary tell you?" I asked. Again I sought about absurdly for Mary's last name and found it. Mary Owen. Yes, that was it. "Miss Owen," I supplemented.

"She said he was broken down. Said he'd had a shock."

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"Do you know who he is?"

I put this at a venture. Blake had had so exactly the fate of the living poet that I could not expect even a woman who looked as this one did to have heard of his thin book.

"Why, yes!" She was amazed at me. The answer leaped to her lips. "He's Blake, the poet."

"Good for you!" I was pleased, though not for Blake. He could afford to wait a half century or so for his bays. I was content with her, because she was fulfilling every promise. "Well, Blake has broken down. Overwork, disappointment, shock. And Miss — "

"I see you call her Mary," she said, with her swift coming smile. "Call her Mary to me."

"Mary is his friend, just as she's the friend of every lame dog of us. And she's seeing him through."

She nodded in what seemed a perfect comprehension, looked thoughtful a moment, and then glanced up at me with that sudden, heavenly smile.

"Well," said she, "they must stay here as long as ever they like. There'll be no other guests in this house for the present. And aunt Patten's coming to-night. She's an old lady, very wise."

Did she then, I wondered, take Mildred's view that the circumstances were unusual, and had aunt Patten been sent for to give the situation countenance? But at least this was her way of doing it. The guardian aunt was summoned from the deeps of old-lady discretion. The unclassified were not turned away. And

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then I realized that I had Mildred up before the bar of this comparison, and was ashamed. Miss Tracy was speaking now with a quick sincerity, as if she had to reassure something in my own mind.

"You know I'm perfectly well aware that this is a great honor to me."

"What is, Miss Tracy?"

"It's an enormous honor to have John Blake here in my house, with the chance of getting him into shape a bit by air and rest. And as for this wonderful Mary, — why, anybody can see what she is."

I was laughing a little at her headlong eagerness.

"What is she?" I asked. "What is Mary?"

She laughed back at me. Her face became delicious when she did that. It lost its grave maturity, and grew all innocently fair. I believe it even found a dimple or two, a beguiling irregularity of its own, to throw it into kinship with the smiles of the common world.

"Mary is a wonder," said she. "I never saw such a face. How the child must have lived to have got such things into it so young."

The child! was Mary young, then? I felt my ignorance of her, and was again ashamed. Perhaps Mary had been too long one who was to serve and never be given her natural birthright of maiden regnancy. Perhaps Mary needed to reign a little, and not be under every foot, even the foot of Blake, the mighty.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Tracy. "I'm very lucky to have got hold of Mary. I shan't let her go in a hurry."

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Then, with no persuasion but that of her warm and willing mind, I began and told her the story of aunt Cely's family boarding-house, always with Mary as the centre of kindly service, and drifted naturally on to the Toasted Cheese, and sketched the boys as well as I might. Of Johnnie McCann and his suicidal mania she could not have enough. When I first saw Ellen Tracy I had guessed she was saint or angel. Now I began to suspect that humor — a kindly, sweet perception of the ironies of life — threaded her through and through. She seemed determined to understand Johnnie, the natal bent of him, not that he was Johnnie, but because he was queer.

"You don't think it's a pose?" she queried alertly, when I had given an instance of his perfectly practical dealings with his mania.

"Oh, no, I'm sure it isn't."

"You think he really feels like killing himself?"

"Oh, yes."

"But why?"

Why? I hadn't gone into Johnnie to that depth.

"I haven't the least idea," I said. "I've taken it for granted. Prenatal, I suppose." That sounded rather reasonable, and I felt I had made good until she said: —

"Wouldn't hypnotism set him right?"

I was startled. We were going into things with a vengance.

"But, bless you," said I, "I don't think Johnnie wants to be cured."

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"You don't?" She stared at me.

"No. It's a part of him, like his taste for lychee nuts and his lavender shirts. Why, no. You mustn't take away Johnnie's mania. He'd be as lonesome as the deuce."

Then she got into a gale of laughter, and I began to learn about her what I found afterward to be supremely true: that she was possessed by the most sweet and inordinate interest in human creatures. It was not that she wanted to pick and steal their secrets or to profane what was theirs. She loved them, that was all. She laughed at them, but so gently, so sweetly that it could not hurt, as women possessed by the love of children go into passionate gusts and barter knowing smiles over "cunning" ways. We talked fast and hard that morning. I do not think I ever talked so runningly with any one. And yet we said nothing really about ourselves. I did not mention Mildred, though that ecstatic secret was warm at my heart and throbbed with it and made my words flow in a happier order and my laughter more exultant. And I could even have wished Ellen Tracy had known this thing about me save that, in a way, it never seemed necessary for her to be told facts at all, much as she might love them. Her sympathy was perfect without. I had assumed, on Mary's tale of her general kindliness, that she had a theory of life, of the division of goods, so far as that might be, of rules to make the community thrive. Nothing of the sort. I questioned her boldly, thinking she had

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a system and would love to set it forth. Not at all. She was not to be classified. She was neither philanthropist with a passion, socialist nor Christian with a nostrum. She just, she said, in a homely phrase that brought sparks into her eyes, liked to have company. She had a good deal of money and no folks but aunt Patten. And then she suddenly gave over talking about it, as if it were, if not distasteful to her, surprisingly out of the way.

Luncheon time came, and Mary joined us, looking rather timid, but with an air of almost ardent expectancy, as if this were a fairy house and she trembled at the next step into another room. The luncheon went off a homely sweet way, where everything was so fastidious. It seemed to be understood that Blake was to have his trays in his own room. I didn't see him before going, but at something after four the carriage came and I said good-by to my hostess and Mary. Mary looked a little frightened. What was I doing, her eyes seemed to ask, leaving her in the company of all this hospitality and angelhood?

"Come again," said Miss Tracy, in a simple commonplace. "Mr. Blake will want to see you."

So I left them standing on the doorstep, she in her angelhood and Mary like a humble servitor, and went to town. That night I sat up late to write. But I couldn't write at all, though the need of my earning money had grown a hundred times more urgent. I had too many things to think over. They came pressing

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upon me, the wonder of what Mildred had told me, and other things I could not let myself consider. The Epithalamium! She had sold it. Mildred had sold it. That was as far as I let myself go. My mind kept telling me that, and there, with the bare fact, I stopped it every time. It should make no comment. But toward midnight, when I was about throwing over the bad job of writing, I got up to go to bed, sat down again, drew my paper toward me and began a novel. I wrote the title fair and large: Ellen Tracy. That was not to be its name of course, and it was not really about Ellen Tracy, for I knew nothing about her at all. But I somehow felt as if I were devoting the manuscript to noble ends if it had her name at the top.

XVII

MILDRED did not come up the next Tuesday as she had threatened. (That is an ungracious word, but I let it stand.) I had written her at once that Blake and Mary had gone, and the matter of their brief stay never again came up between us. I was madly at work, not on short stories, though Rees and Dresser spurred me in almost daily letters, but on my novel. So far, I thought it rather good. It surprised me, when I read over the pages born of a night's ferment, not alone because it went so well but because it was so foreign to anything I had done or even thought. These things I was setting down in a pelting haste were perhaps not extraordinary,

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but they were different things from what I had previously found in myself. Had I been living, I asked myself, a life my outer self knew nothing about? Were there all the time forming in me working forces like the inner growth of a tree, and should I never quite know what they were until I called my pen to liberate them? If that was so, then it was even a more wonderful thing to be a writer of any degree than I had guessed.

I had been twice to see Blake and Mary, and the second time met aunt Patten, an extraordinary little creature with white hair and a hook nose who looked you through and through and said the most amazingly abrupt things: one that she hoped to heaven she could die before snowfall. She thought the chances were greater in summer, you ran such a gantlet of microbes and heat. Ellen Tracy only smiled when she said these things, in an ineffably tender way that meant, I thought, an intimate understanding. But Mary, who seemed now to be working all over the house, said boldly: —

"Oh, Mrs. Patten, do you want to die?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Patten, clicking her needles. "And so would you if you were seventy-three." She looked me through and through. "So you're the author," she said, not unkindly, and I acknowledged I was.

But Ellen Tracy never hinted at my author's work. Finally I got a little fractious about it, and wondered whether she knew what a conspicuous person I was. I didn't care. I didn't want her to speak of the specious things, but I did want to know whether she

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took the trouble to place me anywhere. In these two visits I went up to a top balcony where Blake lay all day in fine weather watching the flooding river or the bright green marsh. He was pathetically not himself, glad to see me, yet not in his old half-absent, funny way, as if, now a human creature had come within his range, he wanted to do the expected thing for him. But at the last visit he roused himself to ask, as I was leaving, —

"Look here, am I living on Mary?"

"No," said I, "you're not living on anybody."

He frowned, more in perplexity than distaste. These things, said his pinched face, were too much for him to untangle. Another look dawned painfully in his eyes.

"Not," he said, "not on her? I'm not living on Miss Tracy?"

That, I saw, would never do. I answered then, and did it badly; but it served.

"If you will have it, Blake, you're my guest here. You can stand that, can't you?"

His face cleared. He thought a moment.

"All right," he said, "for the present."

And I saw what a wise thing it was that I had lied, though in a way I meant to make good by turning it into fact. It had roused him. He was indebted to me. He would live to pay me. I realized I must see Miss Tracy before I left the house, and I found her in a corner of her river balcony.

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"You must let me pay Blake's board," I said.

She looked up rather surprised at the brusqueness of it, and I told her how I had taken it into my own hands, and she must bear me out.

"Of course," she said, at once. "The bill shall be sent to you."

I knew that there had not been any idea of bills. She and Mary had been accomplishing it together in their mother way, but she accepted the correction as of no particular moment, though right if I thought it so. Then she smiled at me in her sudden irresistible fashion and I, with no reason, smiled too. You had to when Ellen Tracy smiled. Her face was so serious — not sombre — in a noble way that, when it took on light and color, it was like a sad landscape under the sun, like those English moors where a glint brings out the rose of heather and the gold of gorse.

"What makes you laugh when you look at me?" she asked, in an almost boyish fashion of direct attack.

"Do I?" was my stupid answer. I could have told her that to look at her was to hear the singing of birds and to know the world was shouting pæan to the spring. This was not as I used to think of Mildred, the Spring herself, a delicate creature all tender hues, come walking in from uncharted coverts. This other woman brought the spring in her open hands, the largess of sun and shower, to give it freely. But all I could say was: —

"Do I? It's very rude of me."

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"It's the way you look, Ellen." This was in aunt Patten's voice from the other end of the veranda. I had forgotten all about her. "You're always smiling. People have to smile back."

"Dear me," said Miss Tracy, in an honest puzzle as if she must really change it altogether. "I didn't know I smiled."

Then Mary came in, and Miss Tracy took her by the hand, as if in some sort of pledge, and said to me: —

"I've got her. She's going to stay with me."

Mary's face, a pretty pink, and rounder than I had ever seen it, grew serious and sweet. She seemed to want to impart a great deal of incredible well-being, but could only manage: —

"I'm Miss Tracy's secretary."

"Not drudging any more?" I hurled at her delightedly.

"Drudging constantly," said Miss Tracy. "Drudging for me. Managing my business. I'm in luck."

I gave some sort of hurrah, and they were pleased with me for being sympathetic. And yet I wondered, as I went away, how it would be about Blake. Would they turn him out of his Pilgrim Chamber whole and sound, and would Mary then wish she were back in some stuffy attic where the conventions would not deny her ministering to him?

That night in going back I bought a paper and saw first of all, as if the print had been a letter to me, the

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death of Mary Harpinger. So that meant my not going home, but driving across the city and taking train to Romney.

What a different little place from that I had seen when I came in the plenitude of youth and untouched emotion to find Mildred like spring walking. Now it was late summer, parched and faded, and something in me, too, had faded. I could account for that. I was married and grown up. The Apple Tree had its old aspect of secluded groups on the veranda, and I, conscious that every newcomer was whispered over, made my way round to the side door, and there I met Mildred in her hat and gloves, and the carriage was coming from the barn. She was pale, there were shadows under her eyes, and I felt, with a sudden compunction, that I should have been with her. Some of this, the hard details, I surely might have saved her.

"Where are you going?" I asked. I did not even kiss her. She looked too wan and tired; but I knew how I would cherish her.

"Back to town," she said, and then I saw her trunks were coming down the stairs. "I tried to telephone you."

"I was away," I explained, and then, awkward over Blake and Mary, "out of town."

When we were in the carriage I asked her if I couldn't do anything by coming back and staying. There must be things to do.

"No," she said wearily. "Mr. Floyd came down."

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He was Miss Harpinger's man of business. "He did everything. He took her away to-day."

We talked no more, and I would not question her because I saw she was too tired. And after all, what could I say about Mary Harpinger? My every spoken word when she was alive had been an offence against her, for I had frankly hated her. I wished now, in the humility we suffer before the dead, that she had not to go so long a journey to earn my softened feeling, and that since I could offer it in an unflawed kindliness, I might do something to help her poor body on its way. Such warmth of heart I had toward Mildred that no service seemed too arduous to buy her a little ease from care, nor any rite too insignificant to be remembered. In the train I laid my hand on hers, so pitifully small for the tasks it did. But the hand did not waken to return my clasp. It was, I thought, too tired. But in the carriage, driving home, she turned to me almost passionately.

"Martin," she said, and her voice trembled. With love, I knew, and my heart answered: love, so late, love begged for in every beat of my hungry heart, love from the wife the bride had never waked to be. I looked at her in the ardent expectation she used to find wearisome, I knew. Now she showed me unashamed a face of such intensity of feeling that I wondered at it. "Do you know what she has done?" she asked me in that same tone of passionate energy.

"Who, Mildred?"

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"Miss Harpinger. She has left me every cent she had in the world."

I seemed suddenly to have grown cold. Tumultuous denials rushed to my lips, but never crossed them. We did not want her money. Whatever she had left we would not have it. It was a stigma, money with no love, no kinship. But all I said was: —

"How do you know?"

"She told me," said Mildred. "She promised me. If I would see her through she would leave it all to me. She was rich. I know that for a fact."

I felt impelled to ask questions to keep her from seeing how far my mind had run from hers.

"How do you know it?" I said.

"Mr. Floyd told me."

"You talked it over with him?"

"Not the will. No, I never told any one of that. About her property in general. It is more than three hundred thousand."

She leaned her head back in the carriage in excess of joy and weariness, and I said nothing and I believe thought nothing. But I remember how the city street looked to me as we drove along to our own door. The day had been warm, and now in the cool of dusk everybody had wandered out. A caretaker in the house next ours sat on the steps, her dressing-sack turned away from her creased throat, a palm leaf fan in her plump hand. Two children were trailing wearily by, from an afternoon in the Common, the elder very small and with a

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world of motherly responsibility in her face, the younger numb with coming sleep yet keeping a tight clutch on something green, no more than grass and plantains, but to him the largess of the summer day. I felt a yearning throb at sight of them, poor little unshielded bodies getting home by their wits through the traffic of the streets. And then I looked upon myself with wonder, at the unsuspected cravings of fatherhood in me. Some mechanical instrument was banging away at a distance, and to-day I cannot hear the waltz it travestied so lustily without the same quick pang it brought me then. For Mildred said, as the carriage stopped and her voice chimed against the bars of the waltz: —

"At least three hundred thousand. But that's very little nowadays. Almost nothing."

XVIII

We went, in all decorum, to Mary Harpinger's funeral. It was a sparse assemblage. She had no relatives, and nobody was yet in town, so Mildred told me. Floyd was there, a red, tubby man, almost sooty in his black. I wondered if Mildred thought his sartorial woe as overdone as I; but she greeted him with a sympathetic melancholy, and in due form we who did not love Mary Harpinger consigned her to the dust. Then we waited a week, two, in what I could but think differing ferments of impatience,

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Mildred half in triumph, half a tremor that was not really fear, and I resolutely determining not to cross that bridge until we came to it, but wondering what I should actually do if I were bombarded by this golden shower of Mary Harpinger's. I dreaded the effect on Mildred of a prolonged watching. She grew wretchedly uneasy, and schooled herself into an alarming rigidity of mind; but she would not go out of town again, and the hot days told on her. At last it came, the news unheralded by any personal note, but staring out boldly from the evening paper. It was Mildred who found it and, with a shaking hand, she passed the sheet to me. I glanced at it merely to see the heading, "Will of Mary Harpinger," and then I threw it down and held my wife to my heart: for her face was ghastly and she was trembling. But it needed more than the comforting of caresses to minister to her. I got her to a couch and telephoned the doctor, and that night, prematurely, my son was born. As for Mary Harpinger's will, I never knew about it until days afterward, when Mildred was doubtfully said to be out of danger. I did not forget it, because it meant infinitely to me now in the shock it had brought her, and its provisions were something I might have to cope with. I need not have feared. Mary Harpinger had left her property, without one reservation, to her business man, Joseph N. Floyd. Then I was glad. At least that burden of ill-gotten money was rolled away. My son, who was puny

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from his untimely summons into the world, would grow, my wife would get back the strength this sordid bargain had drained out of her.

I went in to see Mildred, my heart on my lips, knowing I could allow myself untrammelled joy. Can any man forget what pain, what terror, what delight, rises up in him at the wan beauty of the mother of his child? Yet no man, even if he has learned to weave in words, can tell. It is one of the incommunicable secrets, the giant dread that she might not have returned from the gates of that awful wrestling, the vowing of service to her, of the brooding tenderness due to this white majesty. There she lay, so ineffably frail, so invincible in her spiritual empery, so appealing in the pathos of her powers undone. Her long braids of hair were on her shoulders, her delicate hands were crossed. Even now, in the face of the good cheer of my summoning, I could not forbear a poignant wonder lest after all she was still nearer death than life. I sat down by her, and the nurse went away. Mildred opened her eyes upon me, and at once I saw in them a trouble unfitting the mother's heavenly calm. Her lips formed a word. I bent to listen, and she said, like an accusation: —

"She promised. That woman promised."

I was concerned at the effect on her. Here was she at her weakest still brooding on what assaulted her. I called desperately on my own resources, and I believe some instinct gave me the right clew. Prac-

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tical, cool common sense had been Mildred's prime staff and friend. I had savagely deplored it in her. It had been the inexorable housewife that had sent me out of doors of the house of life when I would fain have gone singing through its halls, and strown its beds with rose-leaves. If it had been the primal impulse in her it was the strongest one, and that I would call on now. I bent to her.

"Mildred," said I, "listen to me. You've been very sick."

Her eyes were on my face and seemed to give assent. She could bear the truth, I knew, and she must have it. Only the truth would save her.

"You are very sick still. You have got to stop thinking about what frets you. You've simply got to do it. When you get well" — I sought about for comfort crude enough, practical enough to meet her definite brooding — "we'll make money. There are ways enough. We'll find the way."

She understood me, and I saw compliance in her eyes. She would dismiss her trouble. She had the will to do it. And so she would get well. I felt with a curious pang of enlightenment over the ways of life that at that moment she was more at one with me than she had ever been — indeed, I suspected, through that sudden blaze of knowledge, that she had never before been at one with me at all. I had always been trying to drag her, in a perhaps cruel ravishment, to the fields of my romantic passion, and now I had at

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last opened the gate and come to visit her where she lived. I saw myself doing it, as in a vision of an afternoon call: coming to see her in her house of life that she was practically seeking to make a more pretentious one, or even, to do her justice, to set on a more firm foundation. This, I saw, was probably marriage as it exists: a defensive alliance for practical gain in a condition of life where the business of man is to live in conformity. I did smile a little at the vanishing of visions as I went out, warned by the coming of the nurse. I had gone into the room, my inner self an ecstasy of poetry and love, and I had left with a promise to the mother of my child that we would thrive. Then I went to see my son; this was the second time I had sought him. He looked very small and very funny. I did not like him especially, which was a shock. I had cherished the feeling that a man had dormant in him some natural affection for his offspring. Nothing of the sort. This little creature was not only uninviting to the eye, but so fragile that it would be a brave father indeed who should crave the privilege of touching him. So I escaped to my study from these imperfectly comprehended developments of the marriage state, and, still with that ironic tendency to smiling upon me, sat down to earn money. I knew perfectly well how the publishers wanted me to do it. I had only to put some of the chaotic ecstasies of my heart when I saw Mildred's face on the pillow into the heart of a Paolo or Luigi, and write a story

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of Little Italy for the paymasters to pronounce it "corking" and urge me on to more. So I took my pen. But instead of the story of Little Italy, I went on with the story of Ellen Tracy. That was the only road my pen would take, now it had smelled it out. And this work I could do in a merry, almost a mischievous mood. It brought the mood with it. I took liberties with the remote Miss Tracy. I abducted her from the pleasaunce where she walked in maiden meditation, and made her fall irresponsibly in love with some one. Could it be with me? That was a part of the witch-work of it all. I was doing this book for my own pleasure, "for fun," I told myself. Heaven itself knew I had had no fun thus far in my halting way, prodded on by necessity to do faking tales, and with only my one poem, the Epithalamium, to make the higher type of man in my own guild take off his hat to me. But that poem the gods had given me, and I didn't dare even think of it now; I didn't dare recall so much as its sacred first line, so did I fear the soreness of the memory of its publishing. The gods had given it, and lived I ever so worthily I could not believe there was that in me to persuade them to accord me another line more. For there is something queer and inexorable about this matter of poetry. The gods give it, or they do not. It is absolutely not a question of attainment. Are they wanton in their choice? Is it that, on some brightest day in Olympus, they feel light-minded, play jokes,

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and rifle Apollo's scrip and toss heavenly measures down to earth like butterflies or shooting stars, letting them hit at will? Or do they pine with momentary longing, and feel fain of earthlings, with their red, warm hearts, like Diana fain of her shepherd boy, and stuff a lad's wallet full of words and measures, snatch him away perhaps to the mountain of song, drug his ears with melodies, and lull his earthly sense, so that when he wakes cold on the barren slopes left by their heavenward flight he recalls dim echoes of what he clearly heard and chants it haltingly, yet to the ravishment of those who never hear the clear initial note? Yes, the gods give it. I think they give it wantonly.

But I would have some fun. I would write exactly as I felt like writing about this warm, goddess-hued creature called Ellen Tracy, and she, who seemed so free, with sovereignty over herself, should walk the paths I laid for her. She was too free, perhaps, too glad with festival, too untouched by earthly hungers. So, as I let her walk into the snare of life, I quite naturally invited her to walk first of all into love. And the man she loved, and who did nôt love her — was it I? Why not, since I was writing for fun what only I should read? It was an old-fashioned, serious fellow. Was it I? No. When the discovery came to me, a flood of memory broke also. It was Egerton Sims. I do not mean that I consciously made it Egerton Sims. With the honest workman this never

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happens, or, if it does, portraiture is a botch compared with the semblance of the image that rises, product of a hundred sensations, sum of fecund years, on the palimpsest of the brain. But when I saw it was like him, I went on writing with a warmth I had not felt for long, the glow of greeting a friend returned after absence, of getting into touch once more with what has brought us good or happiness and realizing how alive it is. Ellen Tracy loved him with a direct impulse of the heart, and he, for reasons lying in his own humility, never knew it, would not know it indeed, but died poor in this world's acclaim. The only trouble was, I was afraid of making him the shadow of Colonel Newcome. Egerton Sims was like that Christian gentleman, and the portrait once done, nobody can do more than paint copies.

For a long time I held to this in an ecstasy of haste, because I knew well it was my pastime, and I must speedily set about redeeming my promise to Mildred and making money. And my faith in her strength and control was fulfilled. She got slowly up from her bed, and taking great care of herself, as I did of her, was soon as well as ever. The baby, too, justified my faith in his powers: for he ate and slept and threw off, as it were with scorn, all imputations of being puny. He would be, the doctor said, a lusty fellow. My sun of domesticity was shining brightly now. Blake, whom I had not had time to see of late, was improving, Mary's letters told me. The letters,

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though, when you read between the lines, were sad. I made a mental note that Mary wanted pulling out of a hole, and I must see to it the minute I could get to her. Why hadn't Ellen Tracy done it, she who had a million horse-power for pulling? I laughed out here, thinking if Ellen Tracy didn't walk Spanish, I'd pay her out for it in my novel, the novel that was getting so personal now that there was no hope or danger of her seeing it. And while I sat at my table wondering if I really could grind out another story of Little Italy that should not disgrace me, so painfully alike had they become, the maid ran up to say a gentleman was downstairs. He had asked for Mrs. Redfield, but she was driving, and so he asked for me. I went down with the thought of Blake in my mind, and found in the hall, as if he had escaped from the larger room to be near the door, a small, set-looking man in roughish clothes, walking back and forth in the circumscribed space of the hall and seeming persistent. That was the way he struck me at the first glance, as a man who, denied at the door, would have said, "You won't ask me in? Well, I'm coming in. You don't remember me? I'll make you, sir." He was all of a color, clothes and all, a sort of yellowy brown even to the whites of his eyes — they might have grown jaundiced from a warmer sun — and smooth black hair. He was not an ill-looking chap, only weather-worn, frowning, and giving me at least this swift impression of an indomitable per-

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sistency. It may not have been the bulldog quality. He was perhaps not ugly enough for that. It might have been the terrier that hangs on.

"My name," he said at once, "is Gorham, Thomas Gorham." Then, as that probably brought no answering gleam from me, he added, "Milly's cousin."

At that, an illuminating memory bade me recall that Mildred had once been engaged to him, and I said, like a boor, "Good Lord!" adding, in as swift reparation as I might, "I'm Redfield, you know. Come in here."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," was his contribution to my cordiality, and I continued: —

"Mildred is not at home. She will be presently. She's out with the child." That's a facer, I thought, you obstinate chap. Mildred isn't the Mildred she was when you called her Milly. She's the mother of a remarkable person I respect and look upon with some hope of a near intimacy when he is less molluscous, whom I call my son.

So we sat down, and Gorham told me he had just landed. Come home to stay, he thought. Had enough of it. You got tired of banging round the world. Wanted to settle down when you were thirty-five. But he was nervous to his finger-tips. That was over the prospect of seeing Mildred. At last she came, lovely, a little languid from the warmth, and after her the retinue, the nurse and my son. Gorham forgot all about me the minute he heard her voice in

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the hall. A keen anticipation darted into his face, and he got up and met her at the foot of the stairs.

"Well," I heard him say. His voice, that voice with the tense fibre in it, almost the twang of a fighting quality, was greatly moved. "Well, Milly, I've come back."

XIX

I HAD followed him with an instinct of courtesy to them both, and I could have sworn that when Mildred saw him she was afraid. She shrank a little, and I, after that one look at her face, ranged myself beside her and touched her hand remindingly. If she had been apprehensive, she pulled herself together, and greeted him with a cousinly frankness. The baby, whom, from a fatuous paternal instinct I had hoped to bring into the foreground, went upstairs comatose in the arms of nurse, a state evidently considered most admirable by nurse herself, though I thought it hardly picturesque enough to impress a wandering cousin. Then Mildred and the cousin and I went into the drawing-room again, and Mildred, sitting down, took off her gloves with the nicety of motion that might have been the despair of women less equipped, and turned toward him with a pretty solicitude for news of his voyage and his present destination. As I sat by, watching her absently, I thought if I were called away from her and had to conjure up pictures

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of her, for my consoling, I should always find it easiest to summon the vision of Mildred taking off her gloves. Cousin Thomas dismissed the voyage as "well enough," and announced his intention of staying for the present "right here." So fixed was the determination of his tone that I could well believe he meant to spend the remainder of his life in that very room, in that chair, indeed. I was solid enough, dull enough in my sedateness, heaven knows; but he was so much less ductile that he inspired me with a light-hearted and flippant sympathy. I felt almost gamesome before him. Here was a man who would accomplish his aims because he would never cease to believe that they were weighty. And after all it would not be from any intrinsic approval of the aims themselves. It would be because he had decided they should be accomplished for the petty triumph of "making good." Yet one thing he had not brought to bear. He had not married Mildred. I wondered, when that thought came to me, how much the defeat meant to him.

He stayed to dinner, and I tried hard to get up some simulating pretence of talk. Indeed, there were things he knew that I sorely coveted. He had seen strange quarters of the world, and I wanted to rifle his brains. I told him so frankly.

"It would be money in my pocket," I said, "if I knew some of the things you do. I could use 'em very comfortably in my business."

Mildred looked up with her alert consideration of

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the practical issue. I could see that if I wanted that stock in trade she meant to get it for me. We were business partners, an alliance made, I knew, against the world.

"You're on a paper, ain't you?" asked cousin Thomas.

"Not now," I told him, and I believe I said it with some shame. In the face of cousin Thomas's strides through primeval forests in search of cash, it seemed a piffling thing indeed to write stories for the entertaining of an idle public.

"Travelled much?" he continued.

"Not at all," I owned. I had lived in Trinidad. That was the only picture I had to contribute to portfolio views of foreign parts. He woke to a brief interest in me then when he asked if I knew anything about the shoe trade there, and dropped me as not immediate to his purposes when I owned that the only shoes I had made acquaintance with were the pair on my own feet. He thereafter devoted his attention in a perfectly open and even childlike fashion to Mildred. And indeed, toughened as he was, seasoned by all kinds of commercial and adventurous wind and weather, he was, in the intercourse of social life, as ingenuous as a child. His interest in Mildred was perfectly undisguised. He asked her all sorts of questions, brusque questions a husband might have resented from another sort of man, but that from cousin Thomas seemed distinctly droll. How was she

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fixed? he asked her as if the question of her fixity included nobody else, certainly not a chap who was present and might have been held responsible, or the young lordling upstairs. Mildred answered gravely, looking at me for confirmation, and a little disconcerted, I thought, at the amusement probably evident in my face. "We're quite comfortable," she said, in a charming compliance with his way of putting it. "Of course we have to be careful, the cost of living is so great."

"You on a salary?" he inquired, turning to me. "Or do you take contracts?"

This was too much, even from cousin Thomas, who meant no offence, and I didn't answer, but rose and brought some tobacco: for now dinner was over and we were in the drawing-room drinking our coffee. I served him, with a superfluous courtesy, to cover my lack of response, but it did me no good. For when he was frowningly puffing away, as if the cigar also were an enemy he meant to put in its proper place by annihilating it, he merely looked round at me and reiterated: —

"You on a salary?"

I laughed outright and capitulated.

"No," I said, "I'm not on a salary."

"What do you invest in?" said cousin Thomas. "I suppose you go in for the non-taxables."

Now I did feel small, because I invested in nothing save my life insurance and daily bread: irritated, too,

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for how was cousin Thomas to know that the circumstance of having taken a house and beginning to live like other men fitted to such houses, kept me on a mad gallop, hearing at all hours, and even sometimes through my dreams, the hissing of the lash that drove me? "Great heaven, cousin Thomas," I felt I might say, if I were as frank as he, "don't you know I have to buy an inconceivable quantity of beeves and fish? Don't you know the innocent chop that appeared on your plate bought in its finicky collarette of fringed paper was 'Frenched' and incalculably more expensive than the chop unpretendingly hacked from the loin and indebted to no tissue paper adorning, nature's own chop, in fact? Do you know the cost of accommodators when maids fly off at an hysterical tangent? Do you know what the doctor asks for training a puny child into a potential prize-fighter?" But these were the queries and confidences I reserved for my pillow about the first of the month when I let Mildred open the bills because I actually didn't dare. She never knew I was afraid. At least I assume she didn't. At that time I hoped she took it as a way of helping me, and leaving my mind free to stroll about in Little Italy on its own poetic and commercial tours.

When cousin Thomas rose to go — and it was not early — he said to Mildred: —

"I'll be round some time to-morrow. Take you for a ride, if you say so."

Mildred hesitated. I thought she was going to

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yield because she must; but she explained in a moment that she always took the baby out for a drive, and she was not quite strong yet, and stayed in the rest of the day.

"All right," said cousin Thomas. "I'll be in some time in the forenoon."

Then he went away, and in the silence between us — a sleepy silence for me, since I had found cousin Thomas less and less exhilarating as the evening wore — I could hear his quick decisive steps echoing down the street. Mildred was questioning my face. I felt that, though my eyes were closed, and I thought she wished, in the manner of the spouse left by the outer world in marital seclusion, that brutal confidence of the wedded, to know how cousin Thomas struck me. I was willing to oblige her, but he seemed, however dynamic, to mean very little to us personally, and I was sleepy. Out of my coma I spoke.

"Is cousin Thomas your second cousin or your third?"

"Why," said Mildred, hesitating over it, "he must be my second cousin."

"Must be?" said I, really thinking of the heavenly surges in my legs and wishing the bed were under them. "You know, don't you?"

"We were almost like brother and sister," said Mildred. "I never should think of resenting anything Tom did or said."

"Brother and sister? I thought you were engaged."

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This out of my coma.

"Did I tell you that?" said Mildred. She seemed annoyed. "Well, if we were, he's forgotten all about it now, and so have I."

"Don't you think it," said I. "Cousin Thomas never forgets anything he ever decided to remember." She turned on her way to the door, and regarded me with a quick look, of surprise, I thought, at my cleverness. I was winking my eyes open and I saw the look.

"Martin," said she, "how do you know that? You've only seen him this one evening. How could you possibly know it?"

I got on my feet and shook my sleepy mantle off.

"Why, anybody could see what cousin Thomas is," I said. "Besides, it isn't one evening. It's hours and hours and years he's been here. But you were a brave girl, Mildred, to break your engagement to him. I should as soon have thought of getting away from an octopus fastened neatly and securely to a rock."

Then Mildred gave me a surprise of her own and quite unwittingly.

"No," she said thoughtfully, "I don't believe I could have broken it if he'd been here."

"You don't?" I was broad awake now and staring at her. "Why don't you?"

"Why, it's just what you said. Tom makes up his mind to get a thing and he gets it. Or he makes up his mind to keep it and he keeps it. He wouldn't have let me go."

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"He wouldn't?" I said, in a sudden heat, and yet ashamed of it even in its inception: for who was cousin Thomas to stir a man's blood? But I added, as the man for whom the engagement had been quashed, "Then I'd have broken his head."

At that moment, before Mildred could say, as she did sometimes wearily when I let any sort of passion get the better of me, "Don't be silly, dear," the telephone rang and I answered it, perhaps a little glad to be excused from my posture of high tragedy. And of all surprising things, it was the voice of Blake. He was at the Toasted Cheese. Would I come over? Blake, whom I saw last lolling on a balcony and fed with possets! Of course I'd come. I ran up to tell Mildred, who was now in her room, that I was going out to meet a fellow; I had never mentioned Blake to her since she saw him in our house. It was not fear that constrained me; it was not resentment. I loved Blake and I simply couldn't. I had my shyness of emotions that would have been perhaps, to the outer eye, mere cowardice. But they were a part of me and not to be resisted lest I lose with them some softness I was rather glad to have. Mildred stood there without her gown, her long, pale hair already about her shoulders. She looked, as I went in, like a slim girl, and my heart went out to her as a man's heart always must to what is moving in its gentleness. But as I approached her, I saw her face was not like a girl's at all. It was rigid, haggard, set. This look I knew. It meant something definite, some-

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thing I recognized. She was planning, planning, and I cursed the needs of common life that they should force a delicate creature to spend her springtime in the calculation of the store for summer and the snow. I took up a tress of the pale, soft hair and kissed it, and Mildred seemed to waken from her muse.

"It's stopped coming out," she said.

I suddenly felt the savage in me.

"Mildred," I said, "Mildred, why don't you meet my love? When I kiss your hair, for God's sake —" I didn't know how to end the cry. What did I want her to do? What that I could tell her? Only, perhaps, to see that at that moment her hair was the veil of her beauty, the waving, living, floating cloud about it, symbol of it, and so alive that to touch it with my lips made a child of me. She looked straight into my eyes, not fiercely as I was looking at her, not in shrinking as might well have been, but as if she wanted to understand me, to know what would best serve between us.

"Should you like me better?" she asked.

I held out my arms to her. Like her better! At that moment, in her cool gentleness, she looked unattainable, and I felt the impossibility of ever telling her how beautiful seemed to me that inner citadel of her being, which I had never seen. It must be the heart of love, for had it not in blossoming made her outward beauty? It was precious to be so defended. But I stretched my arms to her, and she came to me of her own will, and gave three kisses to my lips, such as the

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sun gives when he is too cruel in the south. This from her, who had never come to my arms in willing haste, who was the mother of my child, and yet whose lips, I had known too well, were not my eager subjects but my prey. Then she seemed to slip from my arms and turned from me. Yet I should not have gone to Blake that night save that when she turned she went to her dressing-table and began practically brushing her hair. And her face, as the glass betrayed it to me, was not soft with afterglow, but tired and old. If she had drawn her hair about her like a cloud, even if she had not looked at me again, I should have known my lady's bower was mine. But the room was a quiet bedroom in an autumn night, with a grave, mysterious lady brushing her hair, and scorn got hold of me and gave rout to my passion, telling me I was not base enough to sue for favors coldly given. But outside the door I halted, and after brief schooling of myself, called to her: —

"When you were engaged to him — " I stopped, and she said, "Well?" with a faint curiosity in her tone.

"Did you accept him when he was in South America or when he was here?"

"In South America."

"By letter?"

"Yes."

Then I went downstairs and out of the house, ashamed of betraying myself: for when a man shows his primal jealousy to a woman, he needs to be comforted by her

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lips, her royal favor, to keep his self-respect. But I was glad. Cousin Thomas had not kissed her. Cousin Thomas was well enough, but to see him and his dry way was not to fancy him even in the outer courts of one's liege lady.

When I got to the Toasted Cheese I found things in full swing, and everybody slightly off his head: for Blake had come back and it was a great night for the club. Blake himself was at a corner table eating nothing, no mug even before him, and Johnnie McCann, opposite, watched him with the eyes of a liegeman or an adoring dog. Blake was changed, as he could not well help being, after his total downfall; but he looked a different man from the supine creature Mary and I had carried off to Hopeful Sands. Pale, though not perhaps so thin, for the recuperative diet of Ellen Tracy's house had been directed to the bettering of his nerves by padding them, he yet showed a shade of uncertainty in his movements, a pathetic indirection which was not like the old Blake at all. He had experienced that most disconcerting blow to the man regardless of his body, so that it served his soul: a knockout before the prime of life. A delightful look of welcome ran over his face, and he got up and struck hands with me. Johnnie slipped away, and now I was in the opposite chair studying Blake's face, my own, no doubt, boyishly eager, for I surely loved him.

"But what are you up here for, old chap?" I re-

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proached him. "How do you dare? You were to be secluded and stuffed for six months or more. This is dangerous."

But it wasn't dangerous, his shining eyes assured me. They were the eyes of one to whom something has happened: revelation, joyous, inspiriting change. What secret had he learned at Ellen Tracy's, what note more vivifying even than the Muse's call had he heard over her river at sunsets and at dawn? But he was putting aside my question very practically.

"I couldn't stay there," he said.

I thought I could have stayed there many a long day if I had been Blake, and watched Ellen Tracy and written poetry. He hadn't sacrificed to the boiling of the pot as I had. Though he had helped glut the *Bally Thief* he had done it absently with the upper chambers of his mind always open to the winds of song. As soon as he got a heart-beat stronger from Ellen Tracy's wine and oil and the beauty of her river balcony, he should have begun singing about her.

"You're not up here for good?" I questioned.

"Yes."

"Doctor say so? Let you come?"

"Doctors be eternally malpracticed on and crammed with their own specifics," he retorted. "You don't suppose I'm going to talk to a doctor when I feel like this?"

"How do you feel?"

He gave a low laugh, full of exultant recognition of

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the things that are to be. Nothing but the future has power to move a man like that.

"Young," he said. "Simply young. Young and full of the devil of life."

"What do you mean by the devil?" I asked practically. I wondered whether it was an ill devil he meant that whacks us on to inchoate deeds for the mere lust of life, or whether he was flourishing a figure of speech.

"I mean," said he, "the devil that keeps this present world moving, the fire, the impulse, the surge of life. I feel young."

He might feel young, but he was not, I saw, strong with the strength of life: only intoxicated with its ferment.

"What does Mary say?" I ventured.

His face darkened, not angrily, but rather with a wistful musing.

"Mary? I haven't seen her."

"Isn't she at Hopeful Sands?"

"No. But then I'm not either."

"Mary told me she was going to live there. Miss Tracy told me so and Mary acted as if she was made."

He lowered more darkly.

"Well," he said, "that was the plan. But she gave it up. She came back."

"Back here?"

"Yes."

"Before you did?"

"No. After."

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Then I understood. True to her worship, Mary's allegiance led her to be near him.

"No," said he, reading my assumption, "that's not the reason. I wish you'd see Mary, persuade her to go back."

"Where's Mary living?"

He told me: a house a few doors away from the one aunt Cely had kept for our comfort, and where she now herself lodged in proud competency.

"Yes," said I, "of course I'll go and see Mary. I want to see her."

"Persuade her to go back," said Blake, frowning more and more in an irritation against some plight he could not offer me in its entirety. "It's all wrong, all wrong."

Then he fell into a frowning muse and woke to ask, with a quick look that seemed to trap me: —

"How much do I owe you for my board down there?"

I stumbled, but honestly, because I didn't know, and told him I hadn't got the bill.

"It's all straight, is it?" he challenged me. "You're not playing it on me?"

I had recovered my bravado now, and assured him it was straight. Miss Tracy was to send me the bill, and she hadn't yet done it.

"Very well, then," said Blake; "when she does, hand it over."

What had he to bank on, beginning with scanty

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strength after his downfall? I approached that in haste, because this seemed the easiest way, and he cut me short with the plain fact: —

"I've gone back to the *Bally Thief*. Wadham has advanced me something."

Well, it was like a resurrection to see him there talking, in his right mind, and so the others felt it. They crowded round us when we rose to go, and with a touching gentleness, as if he must not spend his strength on them, shook hands with Blake; and though their faces shone on him, they seemed to know no other way to tell him what a great old boy he was and how reverently regarded. And I got him away because it was evident to common sense that he ought to be in his bed. And I walked home with him to a mean street far from Mary's, and bade him good-night at the door. It was an obscure looking house that might well have some air from the gulf of railway tracks flanking it, though it must be noisy also, and that I hesitatingly asked him. Could he work there, I said, so near the tracks?

"Well enough," he said carelessly, his key in the lock. "Besides, I shall be at the libraries grinding for the *Thief*. Go and see Mary to-morrow," he bade me, the previous trouble of his manner returning upon him. "Coax her to go back. Not from me. From you. Mary'll hear to you."

When I went softly upstairs in my own house, I found Mildred asleep, the child in his cot beside her. Her hands were clasped on the coverlet, yet I took happiness

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in thinking that if there were alarum in the quiet room they would be stretched forth invincibly to guard the child. I kissed the hands lightly, once, twice, but they did not stir. She was far away from me in sleep.

XX

THE next forenoon I went to see Mary at a dull little house, in looks the twin of the one Blake had found, and was told by the incrusted slavey that she was at work and wouldn't be at home before five. So at five I went again, and found Mary on the steps, the old look of weariness in her eyes, the day's lending from the commercial chase. She was beautifully, even gratefully, glad to see me. I should have said, in the common phrase, that when her eyes met mine she looked as if she hadn't a friend in the world. But they cleared in the recognition that here was one at least. She turned about instantly, and said: —

"Couldn't we go into the Common and sit down?" I must have looked my question, for Mary added, "I've nowhere to see anybody here." And then I realized that the freedom and ease of aunt Cely's realm had only been preserved because it really had been the reign of a responsible aunt Cely. Mary was tired, and I noted her flagging walk and set about wondering whether I should take her away at all, when an empty hansom passed us and I hailed it and bade her get in. I told the man to drive to the Fenway and drive slowly,

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and Mary, in the very moment of saying, "I mustn't do this," sank back in the seat and sighed in pure delight.

"I suppose it's the fall heat," she said, as we jogged away. "Or it's my vacation. I don't believe vacations do you good," said Mary, laughing, yet angrily, as if she felt her powers undone. "They just undermine you and keep you thinking of things: how the river looks and how the salt air smells."

"What are you here for, anyway?" I asked, roughly, to make her speak. But her frank eyes set themselves on the distance and I saw the tightening of her mouth. "You'd given up your job," I said.

"Got it back," said Mary.

"They were glad enough to have you, I suppose." So I raged. "They won't find anybody else to work over-time and then take letters home."

"No," said Mary simply, "they won't. But that," she said, with her air of candor, "was only in the busy season."

"I thought you were settled with Miss Tracy. Fixed for life."

"I changed my mind," said Mary, and again her lips made themselves firmer, as if there were things she knew and bade them not to tell.

"Don't you like her?" I asked daringly, and again Mary turned to me.

"Oh," she said, her face flooded with quick feeling, "I do love her."

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"Then, Mary, what in thunder are you acting like this for?"

But though she smiled tenderly, as if I were a good chap and meant well, though so stupidly, she said nothing, and I went on complaining.

"Here are you and Blake safely tucked into paradise, and he appears without warning, even to his doctor, and now here are you."

"Have you seen him?" The last words leaped from her.

"Yes, saw him last night."

"What did he tell you? No, no. Don't say it. I mustn't know."

This was a wail so anguished that I said as gently as I could: —

"There's nothing you couldn't hear, Mary. You know all there is to know."

"Yes," said she, in a miserable acquiescence, "I know all there is to know."

"But why," I went on, changing my tack but continuing my persistent chase of her, "why Blake should look made over, come to life with his resurrection face on, why you should look like a soul unjustly consigned to the pit — "

"Oh," said Mary sharply, though without bitterness, "I can tell you why he looks so. He's in love with Ellen Tracy."

I did not move a muscle nor utter a word of the shock it brought me. Blake in love, Blake the giant, the re-

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mote, uncompanioned creature, the poet! I am glad to remember my first thought was, not the effect it would have on his poetry but on Mary.

"But you mustn't go away," I said. "You mustn't leave her. Not yet."

There was never a doubt in my mind that Ellen Tracy loved Blake as swiftly as he had even looked at her. It all shows what we thought of Blake in those days, and I shall be the richer for remembering. I made no question that Ellen Tracy would marry him, but I hoped Mary would stay with her until then. Now that I had seen Mary in green pastures I couldn't tolerate the thought of her going back to harness.

"I had to come," said Mary, in a dull assertion. "I couldn't stay."

Was it because the sight of Ellen Tracy's beauty was too bitter to be endured? My pottering among the emotions in my journeys in Little Italy had not taught me that. Mary would have died to buy Blake's happiness, this I fully knew. But perhaps she was not strong enough to stay there and see the blooming of the flower when her need of tending it was done.

"I wonder — " There I stopped. I had no business to wonder about the way of it nor what road it would take. I ended lamely. "I wonder at Blake's getting on his feet so soon."

"It's his soul," said Mary, in her simple seriousness, as if she marvelled that I didn't know a thing so evident. "Mr. Blake's body doesn't mean much to him,

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anyway. His soul is all — alive." That last word she whispered, as if in awe of the thing Ellen Tracy had done to it.

We drove for a long time, in silence now, and I wished I could take her home with me to dinner. I believed if Mildred could know this workaday Mary as she was, this product of the kind, common earth, sweet as its blossoms and with its strong pith of service, she would open wide our doors, and see how blest we were to have her there. But it couldn't be thought of. Mary mustn't be hurt by rebuff. So we stopped at her door, and I told her I was coming again and we'd repeat the drive. We were hardworking folk, and the air would do us good. But Mary shook her head and I knew she meant finality.

"No," she said, "you're a dear, but don't you come."

In my own hall I found a note from Blake. He would be at the office of the *Thief* until eight. Would I telephone him there and tell him if I'd seen Mary? I telephoned him at once. Yes, I had seen Mary, but she didn't propose going back.

"She's got to go back," he fumed, at his end of the line. "She mustn't lose a chance like that."

"Well," said I, the more bluffly that I felt, if Blake had got Ellen Tracy, he had the world and the moon and seven stars and could stand a little roughness from us here below, to equalize his lot, "you make her, then. I can't."

"I can't make her," he growled, "and you know it."

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"Very well, then," said I, the more daring with only the impersonal wire between us, "make Miss Tracy do it."

There was silence, and I almost believed he had cut me off. But when I was about to hang up, I heard him again, his voice, even with the travesty of the alien medium, palpably moved.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

No, I didn't really. I only felt at that moment that if Ellen Tracy loved a man, it would be a heavenly assault, a vast surprise, to make her yield in any one small way; for she would be swift in yielding because she loved him. From this hot speculation I escaped, as having no right to entertain it, and then Blake's voice came again, pleadingly: —

"Redfield, you go down and see her."

"See whom?"

"Miss Tracy."

"What for?"

"Tell her about Mary, how plucky she is, how she never'd say die, how she'd keep on typewriting till the day of doom if nobody dragged her out of her chair and eased things up for her."

"What's the use?" I bellowed, so that Mildred, coming down the stairs in white for dinner inquired gently, "Why do you roar so?"

"Haven't you said all that yourself?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?"

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"I didn't know Mary was going away."

"Well, say it now, man. You're the one. Don't you know you are?"

I could almost think he groaned at this, but he threw back angrily: —

"Will you go or won't you?"

"Yes," I said, also on the verge of something that seemed like anger. "I suppose I can."

Why was I to interfere? Yet he and Mary were so dear to me with the exasperating dearness of our flesh and blood that I could not refuse him. Then I went in to dinner and begged Mildred, waiting in her conventional state, to pardon my not dressing. She was very scrupulous about those observances and I liked it in her. It seemed to set her far above me, the height I loved. I fancied if I had not been born on a farm and worn overalls the year round, it would have seemed more important to me to sit down in state.

"Who was it?" she asked, as we began our soup.

"A man I know," I said, despising myself because I could not say Blake. "A friend of his has lost a job. He wants me to interfere."

"Cousin Thomas has been in," she volunteered.

"Yes. He said he was coming."

"He's an awfully clever business man."

"Yes. I assumed so. He seems to be retiring."

"Don't you think, if you talked things over with him, he could make some suggestions?"

"Suggestions?" I stared at her. Pale, cool sea-

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nymph she looked, the white of her dress set off by green and by the necklace she wore, a rivulet of light green stones. "What about? You don't think he's gifted in proof-reading, do you?"

"About prices." She lifted her eyes to mine. "You see he knows how to deal with men. I suppose it's a knack, like any trade. You're not a business man. He is. Let him advise you how to talk to publishers."

I had finished my soup, but my spoon dropped with an unnecessary clang. I was frankly amused at her. In her state of mother bird, seeking about for provender for her young, she seemed to me pathetically dear. But I saw cousin Thomas bearding the publisher in his den, and sitting down in immutable obstinacy until he had gained his advance, and I could not choose but laugh.

"I don't believe we'll set on cousin Thomas yet awhile," I said. "I rather think he knows more about shoes than manuscripts. I never saw that chain before. Where've you kept it hidden?"

I got up and went round the table, ostensibly to see the chain, but really to touch her hair and soften the effect of my laughing at cousin Thomas. For after all she was the dear mother bird. She looked up at me and laid her hand on the bell to summon the maid, but kept it there patiently till I should have concluded this tender ebullition. I never could get over the horrified amusement I had at Mildred's looking

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so poetical and yet treating the garlanded approaches to romantic feeling with such amazing sense.

"He gave it to me," she said.

"He?"

"Cousin Tom."

I had lifted it and was looking at the stones, letting the green glitter run through my hand, when the clasp came undone, — an astounding laxity in a clasp selected by Thomas, — and I laid the thing on the table in a shimmering pool. Then I said, and I hardly knew my own voice, "Give it back to him."

I went round to my seat and she rang the bell, and the maid came in and set before me an admirable fish. After we were both served and the maid had gone — for when we were alone the farmer boy in me petitioned for the removal of that alien silent spook, — Mildred said with perfect practicality: —

"It's not very valuable. He said so. He remembered I wore green. And he's my cousin."

True, he was. I felt rather an ass for my pains, and made my penance. I got up again, walked round the table, clasped the chain about her neck and kissed the top of her head. But I wouldn't apologize.

"How your hair shines," I said. "It looks like wimpling brooks."

"I'm using brilliantine," said Mildred, with a serious responsive interest. "I rather like it myself."

And I laughed out, and for a wonder was not angry because she reduced my rapture over her to some-

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thing in a vial or a box. But her mind was on cousin Thomas, though now she hesitated in preferring her idea.

"I told him," she said, "the baby isn't named."

I had petitioned that our son should be named for Egerton Sims, but Mildred had asked me to delay. Still I had believed that it was to be, and I looked upon it as a grave disappointment if I had to be denied.

"Isn't he named, the little chap?" I said, trying to take it lightly. "I had an idea he was."

"If you are going to name a child after a person, it ought to mean something," she reasoned.

"But that would," I told her. "It would mean a lot. To me, to you through me. You know what Egerton Sims stands for in my eyes."

"Yes," she objected, "but he's dead. And it ought to mean something to the child himself, something definite."

I looked at my plate, while I felt the blood heating my forehead. I couldn't hear the rest of it. If she meant to tell me our son was to be named for cousin Thomas that Thomas might endow him, I frankly didn't feel able to hear it. I didn't feel the suffocating prospect of anger: only a great distaste that such a thing could be and a certainty that it could never be with my consent. So I said nothing; but that night when she looked her fairest standing by her child's bed, I went up to her and turned her to face me. I had saved the words until then when I knew

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I could not by any response be led into outer harshness.

"Mildred," I said, "if you meant you wanted to name him after your cousin, I can't agree to it, that's all. If you don't want the name I did, I'll meet you on another. But not for him."

She looked very reasonable over it, and kind.

"After all, it wouldn't do," she said. "I asked him, and he said he didn't want it. He practically refused."

"You asked him? When?"

"This evening."

"Where was I?"

"Why, upstairs writing. Tom ran in a minute. He's all by himself here in the city. He's lonesome."

"Well, he's a decent fellow to refuse," I said, "with an idea of the proper thing. But why, may I ask, why wouldn't he?"

Mildred drew the soft blanket an inch higher over the little form.

"He doesn't seem to care about the baby," she owned. "He said he wasn't interested in him."

"Only in you."

"Why, yes," she said, "he's always been interested in me."

I was going off to my study for an hour's work, but I stopped outside the door and thought. My mind had run back, in the capricious way minds have, to the past, and brought up from the sea of thing sub-

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merged, a tone, a word, something it had, perhaps, unknown to me, been searching for.

"Why, Mildred," I called, "where's the colored person?"

"What colored person?" she answered, in the absent tone of her who hangs her cherished skirt up properly.

"The colored person cousin Thomas married."

"Oh, he didn't marry her. It was something in a letter that made me think he would."

XXI

The next day I did go down to Hopeful Sands. It had to be in the late afternoon, because I was possessed by my novel, and when I had sat down to it for an hour at nine o'clock I found the time ran on to twelve.

I was tired of my pen and the race of my fancy, and the long sweep of sand looked beautiful to me and the air off the marshes quickened me. The causeway lay silent under the pale sunlight, and the island itself was still. It looked to me, fresh from city activities, like a land where it must seem "always afternoon," and I went up the pathway to the house treading on dead leaves and fain of their savor, wondering whether I might go on and on, not stopped by inquiring service, to the river balcony itself and find Ellen Tracy at the end. It pleased me, this fantasy

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of a sleeping palace, and I was smiling at it in my thought, when suddenly I turned with that prescience we have at an unheralded presence, and saw her. It was through a vista between evergreens; there on a knoll of light green turf, green enough for spring, she lay in an abandon of nymph-like grace, supported on her elbows and silently watching me. Somehow in spite of the supine grace of her body that might have been luxuriating there in solitude and ease, I did not get the idea that she was delighting in her indolence. It seemed to me rather the pose of a woman who had thrown herself down in an abandon of despair or warmer grief. But she had heard me, she was watching me as a wood animal watches, and she did not mean to be discovered. Nevertheless with an impulse as strong as the counter one in her, I turned and pressed through the evergreens in impetuous haste. But before I reached her she was on her feet, and was standing in a conventionally welcoming attitude, hand outstretched and face alight, not, I was amazed to see, with the expected smile, but more. It was ablaze with welcome. Yet that face was thinner than when I had seen it last. There were fine lines of pathos under the eyes, and the eyes themselves, in spite of what looked to be their tragic joy, bore the signs of a tragic grief. I took her hand, and looking into her eyes, I said, in a rough inquiry:—

"What's the matter?"

I declare that what I said to Ellen Tracy then or

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for many a day after was out of my power to say otherwise. With her I was off my guard. She seemed so different from all created things, not only through her own nature, but the profession of universal kindliness she had set herself, that I could not for a moment think of her as a woman to be safeguarded from the clearest truth from man.

"What is it?" I asked again. "What's the matter?"

A faint smile touched her lips, and the eyes looked at me almost gratefully, I thought, and with the languor of pain past.

"Come into the house," she said. "Aunt Patten is there."

"I don't want to see aunt Patten," I said, remembering Mary and Blake and my queer errand. "I want you. Isn't that a seat through there? Can't we sit down and talk?"

She had flushed delightfully when I said I wanted her alone, and new life seemed to flow into her. I was beginning to learn what marvellous changes were in her, and how enchanting her variability could be, like the sun on rosy moors. She led the way to that other covert where were seats, and where we looked down into a glade of mighty loosestrife and hypericum, and there she folded her hands upon her knee and waited. I could see that she was not unhappy any longer, and for me, I was topfull of a calm content. But I thought it was the autumn day and my escape

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from city turmoils. I tried to speak, and found I was breaking into an embarrassed laugh.

"I don't know," said I, "how to begin. I've come to say something, but I am afraid I shan't manage it, after all."

"Never mind," she returned, in the softest voice, and I thought she added, "This is enough."

But as that didn't pertain, I made up my mind she couldn't have said it, and tried again to break through that mood of hers which seemed as if it wouldn't help me. Indeed, how could it, since she didn't know how difficult it was, the thing I had to say? I plunged.

"It's about Mary."

I thought her face settled into a less vivid expectation.

"Yes," she said gravely, "you've seen her?"

"I saw her and talked with her, and she told me she's not to be with you."

"No," said Miss Tracy, quietly. "She is not."

"But we're awfully disappointed," I urged awkwardly, "Blake and I."

At Blake's name her face waked again, ran over in a vivid flash of consciousness if nothing more, and I went on,—"You see we're worried about Mary. We worry like the deuce. She's had such a life of it. It's gone on too long. It simply mustn't go on much longer, or there won't be any Mary. And you seemed such a special providence. We can't really let you off."

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She was smiling at me very kindly, with that gentle, impersonal look she had had for us all at first; but she shook her head.

"I'm afraid it's got to be," she said. "We can't any of us make your Mary stay against her will."

"It isn't really her will," I urged. "She adores you. She thinks you're the best thing ever made."

"And I think she's the best," said Miss Tracy. "But as things are, I believe she's right. She'll stay away from me for a time. Maybe then she'll come back. Maybe I can persuade her. But not now. It wouldn't do the least good to try it now."

I dug my heel into the ground and muttered something. It seemed to amuse her.

"You're not used to being refused," she said, in that soft voice.

"It's Mary I'm thinking of," I said, "Mary — and Blake."

Her face took on the veil of soberness that was, I could swear, the pattern of the sombre face that had broken into welcome at my coming. She answered gravely and with a candid simplicity, making no pretence at subterfuge.

"Yes. Mr. Blake. That's another matter."

How great a matter was it to her, I wondered, and hardly dared look at her. I was irritated with my own budget of fact I could not use. Since I could not confess to her I had been told Blake was in love with her, and that I did not need telling to know

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Mary was in love with Blake, what was the use of going on through this haze of indirections I believed she hated as much as I?

"Mary'll come out safe and sound," she said. "So shall I."

There was a touch of bitterness in this, and what bitterness there was for such a lady I could not see. Ruth there might be for those who loved her and must be denied even a moment of her fair presence, but not bitterness.

"We're women," she went on. "It's our birthright. But Mr. Blake! And it isn't even because he's a man and not strong — it's because he's a poet."

"Did he seem to you strong enough to go back to work?" I asked, taking a path removed from subtleties.

"No, oh, no. He's by no means strong enough."

"Couldn't you persuade him?" I asked boldly.

And now she answered with some rigidity of purpose, as if rather reproaching me for making her say it.

"He had to go. He may not be the worse for it, after all. It's better to be a man than a poet."

And again her face ran over with that sun of smiling candor. It had an appeal in it, a certainty of your answering. "I'm sure you agree with me," it said. "I'm so grateful for it. But if you have one reservation, sweep it away, I beg of you. Do agree with me."

I was out of conceit with my errand and myself. I was a little jealous, if that could be, that she should

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so deify the mission of poets and have nothing to say to a poor prose writer who was, after all, doing his best to boil the pot. I really think that was the first time I had ever wanted anybody to commend my Little Italy, except perhaps some publisher's emissary who might advance me ten per cent on futures.

"You seem to think mighty well of poets," I said.

"They're the blood royal," she returned, with a bombast I liked. It started my pulses, for I thought so, too. "The rest of us ought to be taxed, and heavily, to keep them in green valleys."

"Spouting all the time," I jeered.

"Fluting, if you like. Or making big symphonies and booming away at us with the noise of thunder and water-spouts."

It was foolish talk, but I liked it.

"Well," I said, and I said it earnestly, for I felt I had a right, through my love of Blake, to those premature good wishes known blatantly as congratulations, "you've the game in your own hands. You can keep your poet in his green valley. You can plant lilies there — and when he's tired of fluting, you can put on a white gown and go and play the Muse to him."

She was looking at me in a gently reproving way, as if I were treading too lightly among intimacies.

"No, Mr. Redfield," she said, "I can't. You know I can't."

And I saw that she believed Blake had been talking

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to me, that he had told me he loved her and told me further that she did not love him. It startled me out of self-command. That any woman should not love Blake, the mighty, when he sued, I could hardly believe. That this woman, all fire and the fantasy and even childishness of romance, should not love him, was not to be understood.

"Don't you mean to marry Blake?" I asked, in a rush of ill-regulated feeling.

"Why, no," she said, adding in what sounded like a wondering reproach, "You know I don't."

"By God!" I said, and got up and walked about.

The words were a mild commonplace compared with my feelings, only an inadequate reference of this amazing circumstance to the only intelligence that could comprehend it. I stopped before her and looked down at her where she sat, almost meekly feminine, with no implication of having dominion over the hearts of men. I was remembering his face as I had seen it that night at the Toasted Cheese, the vividness and triumph of it.

"But Blake doesn't know it," I said. "He thinks you will."

She looked pained at that, but she did laugh.

"Oh," she said, in what seemed a tender exasperation, "what a child you are."

But she was not repulsing me and I blundered on insanely.

"He's another man. As Mary says, he's all soul,

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and his body's got to toe the mark. And you say you — oh, next thing you'll be telling me he hasn't fallen most terribly in love with you. I've no patience with you womenfolk."

Her eyes were dancing. She seemed willing to forget Blake.

"Oh, do have patience with us," she mocked. "Do have patience."

"But you mustn't be hard on Blake," I reminded her, "you merciless womenfolk. We must remember he's a poet."

She saddened all at once.

"That's it," she said, "he is a poet. He mustn't waste himself on anything that does him no good. Tell him so. He'll listen to you."

"Oh, no," I countered, "he won't listen to me. He'll listen to you."

And here she sighed, and I got a pretty plain idea that Blake had thrown his love at her like a great blinding shower, had asked no answer, and gone away to his task to come back again and put his man's question to her: this when his prospects would half warrant it. And I felt like a great, soft boy as I stood before her, pleading for my friend in such sentimental phrasing as I had thought I could only throw half cynically into Little Italy.

"You've got to love him," I said. "You've got to, Ellen Tracy."

She looked up at me with I know not what in her

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eyes, not reproach, not reminder, not confession; but as they touched the answering messenger of my own for a second, a strange thing happened. I lost count of time and recognition of this place. I forgot Blake, forgot my most dear son to whom I meant to be as honorable an example as Egerton Sims had been to me, forgot Mildred with the brilliantine on her hair, and even forgot the conscious me to whom I daily referred my acts. I was simply in a large place — green it was, with the boles of trees thereabout and the sound of falling water — and Ellen Tracy was there, and all the wistfulness had gone out of her face and given room to a sweet placidity. The currents of life ran evenly, and we desired according things, and what we desired the earth was fain to give us. That must, I thought, in a by-current of my mind, have been like the days in Eden bower. And I knew with a deeper thankfulness than I could express, that the old life of harried feeling and imperfect effort was done with, and that this was henceforth peace. But as I stood there in that equilibrium between joy and pain, I heard her voice, in trouble, in persistent recall to some other state she did not trust herself to leave.

"No," she kept saying, "no, no."

Then I came awake — though indeed I had seemed to be more completely awake before — and there were the trees about us, though not the trees of my other vision, and the garden seats and the flowers below us,

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and there was she, her face all broken by a strange illuminated anguish of delight.

"What was it?" I asked her.

I think I whispered. She shook her head.

"Did I" — but I had to know — "did I touch you? touch your hand?"

She broke out at this into a great sob of something like thankfulness.

"No," she said, "no! Of course not. No!"

I tried to laugh and managed it badly.

"I must have got too much sun," I said. "It was pretty hot on the causeway."

But it hadn't been hot, and she knew it and so did I. And I said laughing: —

"All this talk about poets!"

But something in me, something nobler, more indomitable, more real than all these sham conventions, rose in me, and would satisfy itself.

"Tell me," said I, "do you feel as if you and I had met before?"

She made no subterfuge.

"Oh, yes," she said, quite simply.

"And known each other?"

She nodded with the same candor, as if she owed fealty to our common memory.

"When did it seem so first?"

"When you came." This she stated without emotion of any sort. "When you came with them."

"Did you feel as if you had met Blake before that day?"

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I had a mad desire now to know. But curiously the desire was its own defeat. For as this personal longing dominated me, it seemed to shatter the content between us, and to terrify her in some way and break the pure lucidity of her thought. But she answered me.

"No," she said, "I had not seen him."

"Nor any one in that strange way," I persisted, "any one but me?"

And though it seemed a cruelty that tortured her, she answered out of her gentleness: –

"Not any one but you."

A madness of joy had possession of me. She and I alone had actually been in that Eden we had now summoned about us with an unwitting will. But something, the same look of the place we stood in now, took hold on me like a reminding touch, and I knew I must leave it and leave her before I tried to drag her back with me to that forbidden heaven. I believe I was going without another word, but some movement of hers made me turn, and I saw her again with the late afternoon light lying upon her through the trees, and her sweet mouth a-quiver. And mad as the thought was, I could believe her face, her half-expectant pose, was an innocently passionate question to me. "Why must you go?" it said. At least that is what it said to me. And because I could not touch her hand or say good-by in any way set down by rule, and yet would have her know how divinely well I

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wished her, I found myself saying what I had never said to anybody before, and heretofore should have been inept in saying: "God bless you." Then, walking as fast as I could, I went away.

XXII

THE next day this did not seem to me a dream, but an exquisite verity that made the sky brighter and the earth's response to transcendent things the more assured. I walked lightly, and I found myself gay at breakfast time, and chaffed Mildred about her son and his certainty of being brought up in some obscure sect because I knew she advocated the religions that left us well placed. But looking gravely at me, she conjured me not to laugh at sacred matters, and I asked her if she considered the Unitarians she affected as serious matters, and laughed the more. It all, the whole fluent scheme, looked very gay to me that morning. I seemed to have made a discovery of more things in heaven and earth than I had dreamt of. It was unnecessary to define them. I suspected that their very preciousness would cause them to elude definition, and that if I looked at them closely they would be gone. I had known a man at Trinidad who, with cataracts beginning on his eyes, could, by not looking directly at it, still get the sunset glow. I was like that purblind creature; if I turned my eyes another way the glow was there. I didn't like to

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carry out the simile. Was I blind from some growth of custom or false belief? And could divine, swift surgery sometime cut the veil and free me? Meantime I poured myself into my novel and the glow was there, indirect but splendid, illuminating the page. I went to see Mary again, and found her much like her old self. She had, with the pitiful patience of woman, settled into the decreed or chosen rut, and was making the best and smoothest of it.

"Let me get my hat," she said, as we talked unthinking commonplaces in the hall. She came down in her outdoor things, and we walked away into the Common. Mary had had time to put aside her own coil of circumstance and think, in her dear way, of me because I was a friend.

"I don't believe I ever wrote you a word about the baby," she said. "Things were pretty bad just at that time — and then," said Mary, in a burst of honest betrayal, "I didn't know how to do it."

"He's a nice chap," said I. "Named for Egerton Sims."

For that had actually come to pass, and I had heard Mildred tell a well-placed caller, a friend of Mary Harpinger, that Egerton Sims was an Englishman of rank who had been my earliest friend. It made me wince a little; but after all, in a way it was true, and I had got into the habit of discounting Mildred's pathetic efforts to make our social mantle as warm as possible. I was sure she had merely a

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pretty way of presenting facts, right end forward. She wasn't all the time hitting you in the face with them, but offering you the smooth handle, so that the fact could be used to an excellent purpose. I knew what Mary meant about not knowing how to hail the advent of my son. She could hardly do it, unconventional as we all were, with no message to his mother; and his mother, in that moment of cool scrutiny in her own house, had driven Mary out of it in every sense.

"Did you tell Blake?" I asked, with a father's insensate pride.

"No," said Mary. "I don't believe I did. He was too sick. He didn't notice things. Nor Miss Tracy. I don't tell her things," said Mary, in a burst of generous wonder over Ellen Tracy, "personal things. She never asks questions. She makes you feel they're ill-bred."

And yet she had run a race of question and answer with me about Johnnie McCann and the entire circle of the Toasted Cheese. It seemed then as if she had to know. Indeed it had seemed as if she and I hadn't needed to put up any fences of discretion while we talked. We had to talk.

"Have you seen Mr. Blake?" Mary was asking.

"Once. Have you?"

"Yes. He's taking on at a great rate about my not going back." Mary sometimes returned with a quaint wholesomeness to the speech of her country days. "He looks pretty well."

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"He'll overdo, I suppose," I contributed.

"Yes," said Mary, philosophically, "but that won't hurt him. He's got hope now. It'll carry him through everything till his next breakdown."

Evidently I hadn't the breeding of Ellen Tracy, to the end of suppressing natural curiosities.

"Mary," said I, "is he going to get her?"

"No," said Mary, coolly, "she doesn't care anything about him."

Of that I also had a certainty, a certainty as calm and even sad, because I couldn't without revolt contemplate anything that meant suffering for Blake.

"Do you know that?" I asked her.

"Oh, yes," said Mary.

"Did she tell you?"

"Tell me? She? Do you think she would?"

No, I didn't think so, but I liked to have Mary confirm it. It gave me a pride I had never felt in any possession of my own to think of Ellen Tracy's pride, that set her on the farthest hills. I saw her there, without the coldness of the hills themselves, but throwing on their snow a rosy dawn.

"She's daft over his poetry," I persisted, "as daft as we are."

"Oh, yes," said Mary, rather wearily. "But that isn't being daft over him. He'd give all his poetry just now for her prizing him in another way — prizing him because he's a man."

I wondered if her "just now" meant that she ex-

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pected the pendulum to swing back and the poet to forget his vast desires. Mary was very wise, with a sad, homely wisdom, and I felt she knew.

"You needn't put me in. I'm not daft over poetry," said Mary, as if it in no way availed her to get more than her due. "It's only because he cares about it."

So I walked home with her through the November twilight, a pale yellow sky showing the bare trees like "ruined choirs," and a lambent gleam in the pond. And as it usually happened now, I found cousin Thomas established in the library, sitting upright, his head dropped a little, his hands tormenting a pencil — for he never relaxed in any sense — and Mildred, pale with weariness, yet scrupulously pleasing, in her chair by the fire. I was often sorry for her in these days of besetment by cousin Thomas, irritated, too, because I felt she had herself to thank and she had only to be a little less ingratiating, a little less compliant, to send him to the rightabout. He was the most uncompromising of guests. He would come at ill-considered times, perhaps half an hour before luncheon or dinner, and yet would never sit down with us. Rather he waited, in a perfect silence, not, I was persuaded, opening book or magazine, but sitting in the same rigidity, perhaps entranced with financial dreams, perhaps, though that I hardly like to consider, occupied with the tragedy of his disdained heart. Sometimes the invisible picture of him there, awaiting the return of Mildred to engage her in their almost wordless intercourse, was

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too much for me. My food choked me, and I let the dishes pass. And again it moved me to a nervous laughter that I had to summon words to cover. But always Mildred behaved perfectly, if she was bored never confiding the anguish of it to me, and always treating him with a scrupulous consideration. To-night he chose his accustomed part of waiting until she had dined; but some spirit of the outer world was in me, some infection perhaps of Mary's homespun delightfulness or the nearer memory of Ellen Tracy, and I would have none of it. I urged him, even boisterously, to the table; but he was inflexible in the degree that I was exigent. He would simply "sit right there," and he did, until, having by nervous consent made a short meal of it, we came back to him. I was about to exchange a word or two, according to my wont, and then betake myself upstairs to write, but he detained me. Ignoring my humble mention of some news in the evening paper as common pabulum whereof we might partake, he intimated that he had something to present to me. Would I sit down? So invited, and guessing from an uneasy consciousness in Mildred's look that she knew what was coming and would fain get it over, I sat down at my own hearthside and offered cousin Thomas a cigar. He refused it briefly. I had gathered that the comfortable palliatives of life meant very little to him. He was most temperate in the matter of indulgences, and took his dinner in the middle of the day to "get it over." I myself was not

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devoted to creature pleasures. Indeed, if I had been, my memory of Egerton Sims would have made me a little ashamed of it. Yet I did like the business of satisfying our stomachs to be accomplished as delicately as possible. Cousin Thomas looked up at me, and I felt guiltily that having caught me contemplating the top of his shiny black head, he must also know what my attendant thought had been: the wonder how that head, with its direct, accurate processes, felt inside.

"I've been speaking to Milly," he began, and it annoyed me again to hear a creature so divinely tall called Milly. "I've been telling her I want to settle something on her."

I felt most horribly embarrassed. I didn't want to assume for an instant that I could think he meant money, and yet I knew he did. We were in for it, I thought, troubled refusals on Mildred's part and mine, warranted to hurt nobody's feelings, not even a Thomas home from foreign parts with a good heart and an imperfect knowledge of things as they are, for good reason or otherwise, done. I bowed, vaguely, I hoped, implying that the next step was his. It evidently involved explanation, persuasion indeed, if that proved necessary. And Mildred began to fidget, if a creature divinely tall may do so, and I knew she wished, like me, the moment were well over. So I tried to shorten it for her. I believe I proffered some personal banality to the effect that he was very kind, which seemed to encourage him.

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"I'm pretty well fixed myself," he told me, as he had before, "and you're not likely to do much better than you're doing now. Do you think you are?"

I answered with a becoming humility, because I was so tickled with the sheer genuine honesty of him, that it might well be I should not.

"I've been looking into your branch of business," said cousin Thomas, "and it appears to me as if it was one where you've got to make a hit at the start, or you don't get into the game."

Here Mildred, in a belated loyalty, I thought, came in saggingly to suggest that I really had made a hit at the start. There were my stories of Little Italy!

"I know all that," said cousin Thomas, as if it were an argument between them, whereof my part was to stand modestly aloof. "But how much does it amount to? How much can you count on?" he tendered me, seeming to find it his privilege to be answered. "How much?"

"How much indeed!" I echoed, in an exclamatory acquiescence; and having waited for a definite answer, he went on.

"I don't know whether you're insured."

This was partially interrogative, and I tried to look mildly interrogative myself, as if being insured were a virtue that might be imputed to any man, but for myself I didn't know.

"Let that be as it will," he concluded, "Milly's got to be safe and I'm going to make her so. I'm going to

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settle something on her. She can't touch the principal, and you can't either. But she'll be sure of a little income — three thousand a year."

Here we were up against it, and I was the one to speak, with the more direct approach to indignation that I had to do it because it looked as if Mildred were party to the knowledge of what he was going to say, and had, it appeared, from his good faith, accepted it.

"But, my dear fellow," I said, "on what ground could you do it? or on what ground could it be accepted? It's tremendously generous, but on what ground — "

He looked at me in a serious consideration, as if wondering if I really didn't see.

"I told you," he said. "I'm well fixed. I want to see Milly the same. That ain't all I mean to do for her. But for the present it's all. I want her to be comfortable and I want her to be safe."

It did touch me to the soul, the confounded goodwill of him, the pig-headed determination to make his money serve the purpose for which he had bred it. I hope I answered gently, and certainly I did with more explicit yielding to his questions.

"She will be comfortable. I shall see to that. And if I die, she won't be left stranded. I am insured."

He nodded. He approved of me a trifle more, I could see, as an unpractical fellow who had yet the wit to protect his own.

"Well," he said, "that's all right. So much the better for Milly. And I'll settle something on her, and then we'll see."

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I wasn't at cross purposes with him now, because he was unconsciously letting me look more and more closely into the processes under his shiny hair, and I knew he had so set himself to one desire, to get money for his wife Milly, that when that vision was reft away from him, he still clung with deathless tenacity to the fact that the money should be devoted to Milly though she was not his wife. I have never been able to settle to my own satisfaction whether cousin Thomas loved Mildred then, though love is such a chameleon creature that it may well take color from the mind that harbors it. Perhaps he had for her no fervid emotion, no romantic dream; still the desire to guard and foster her that was forming his primal spring of action at that time might well be called by so high a name. But it had gone far enough, and I had to meet him bluffly.

"It's no use," I said. "You're an awfully good fellow, and I'm no end obliged. But you can't, you know."

Here he sounded a note of irritation, though all abroad as to the motive of it.

"I tell you I can do it," he said. "I can do it easy."

"But I can't," I threw back at him, short and sharp. "I can't allow it."

Mildred gave a little pathetic sound, but I didn't look at her. Our eyes were meeting, his and mine. We were the fighting males, and the cause of our measured glance was far outside the field. It was absurd, and

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I felt foolish, but this was the way it had to be done. Cousin Thomas stared at me, no hostility indeed in his face, but pure surprise.

"You don't want Milly to take it," he said. "Why not?"

"I won't let her take it," I amended. "You're a good fellow, but that won't make it possible. Such things aren't done. Is there any convention under heaven to allow a man to settle money on another man's wife?"

Cousin Thomas stared. I was mad, he thought, the mad writer of foolish tales. And his next words confessed it virtually.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said he. He got up, staring at me fixedly, and seemed to summon all his forces to the problem. But they were insufficient. "Well," said he, "I'll go and get some supper."

And though I followed him into the hall and, conscious of the absurdity of it with a man who had refused to dine, begged him to stay and have something served him here, he shook his head and struggled into his overcoat, like all his clothes, mysteriously too small. And I went back to Mildred, fancying we were perhaps to assume an according view and regard him with a whimsical gratitude, and found her as I never had before. She was angry. In every exigency of domestic upheaval over my own shortcomings, she had been sweet decorum itself, she had lived inside a reserve I

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admired and feared to break. But now there was a tiny scarlet spot on each cheek, and her eyes hurled at me a shaft that hurt in striking. If I had had to name it, I should have called it scorn.

"You can throw away money if you like," said she.

And as I did not know her look, I felt I did not know her voice. I found myself speaking. There seemed a necessity to cast in words to stem the flood of hers. What I said was foolish, but might serve.

"I don't throw away money, dear."

"The question is," she went on, "whether you've a right to throw it away when it belongs to me."

"Belongs to you?"

"Yes. He is giving it to me. He isn't giving it to you. It belongs to me."

"But Mildred," I said, "you belong to me."

She did not answer. She only looked at me. Fierce unspoken denial blazed in her eyes. I had never seen anything so white, so passionless as her lovely face awaken to such life. This extremity of anger always looks like scorn. The heart that feels it withers and grows cold. I felt myself a wretched fellow indeed to have earned a look like that. Now the old commonplaces we jeer at because they are the flower of sentiment have the truth in them, after all. We turn away from the ranting couple on the stage who are reconciled by the voice of a child. But it's the truest thing in life. Suddenly I thought of the boy up there in his innocent sleep. We couldn't tear and rend and scorn

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each other. We were his, if not each other's. That was an eternal pact. I crossed the space between us and took Mildred in my arms.

"Don't, dear," I said. "Don't do it. The boy — he'll hear us."

That was a silly fiction, but I believe I felt the soul of him, far off in his sleepy heaven, would hear the clamoring souls of us. She suffered me to hold her so, and as I kissed her cheeek, she began to sob, wildly, tempestuously. I had never seen her cry, and it brought a terror to me. I comforted her, and she endured my comforting, and presently left me to go to her own room. I thought she maybe went to the boy to get solace from his sweetness, and though I longed to follow her I would not, because it was through me her hurt had come. But when at midnight I went to her, she was asleep in pale placidity.

XXIII

From that time I seemed to be living Blake's life with him, because I read the inner secret of it; and I knew it for a high destiny to be the lover of Ellen Tracy. Looking at him through the glamor that always divided him from me, I could not believe Mary was right when she said he would not get her. Of course he would get her, he that came into the world endowed with privilege. He was working very hard, not at poetry, I guessed, but, like the rest of us who

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had the domestic mouth to fill, at crude tasks for money. One day I met him by chance, and thought he looked another man, stern, dauntless, with the fighting grip about the mouth, and hope, trembling hope, in the eyes, the look of one who has at last given hostages to fortune and thenceforth must hang on the will of heaven because he has so much it can destroy. He stopped me and spoke peremptorily.

"You've never sent me that bill."

I feigned stupidity and forgetfulness. If he meant his board bill from Ellen Tracy, I hadn't got it.

"Then get it, man," he ordered. "Don't you see I can't?"

Of course I saw that. His heart full of lilts to her perfection, he couldn't ask her to let him pay for what he ate. So I promised to attend to it, and he left me after a sudden question I felt horribly like an assault on inner chambers whereof the door was never opened now.

"Why aren't you writing poetry?"

I may have looked sick and even terrified, for he added, in a kindly afterthought, "Perhaps you are. Perhaps you're not publishing. That's a good idea. Save it and pour it out pellmell all at once and get some better judgment on it than this mean time. It's a day of little things. But I tell you, the fellow that can do your Epithalamium — he's got the seeds of immortality inside his skull."

My Epithalamiun! That was the moment of my

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life I never meant to think of again, for it led me a way I dared not go: to the knowledge that my wife had sold it and that she saw no reason why I should not have rushed with it to the publisher's instead of timorously unrolling it before her eyes. Certain men, the best men I knew, never forgot that the Epithalamium was my triumph; but to me it was sore defeat. And I wrote no more poetry because no more came, and I was still of the opinion that the Muse must not be beckoned. She might not even be hailed when she came wandering down my way, the dew of Parnassus wet on her unbound hair. Only then I could throw myself at her feet and while she breathed the exhalation of my worship, devoutly wonder whether one of her wilding leaves might fall on me. I have wondered whether, for an old-fashioned chap like me, there was ever one so steeped in the romance and worship of things. Was it youth alone? I think not, for I was getting beyond first youth. And early and late I wrought on my novel, until "The End" was inscribed, and then I copied it in mad haste, changing the name of Ellen Tracy to one conformable to the market. And letters came from Rees and Dresser, reminding, even censuring, letters. I was sending them nothing. They begged to suggest that the output of the year was surprisingly below that of the six months previous. But my mishandled brain had not lost its cunning, and because I could always imitate when I would stoop to do it — stoop from the eminence I thought Egerton Sims had bade me hold —

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I began to imitate myself, and as I had held my mood of gay acquiescence in life ever since Ellen Tracy and I had seemed together to open the door into lands unseen, so now I wrote from its accession of a strange power and did better work, my taskmasters told me, than even their foresight had conceived. But I knew it was not sound work. It was at last made after a pattern, and though I had myself cut the pattern in the first place, I could feel no heart in such a deed. I had need to make good in the market-place, for cousin Thomas, with his freely offered affluence, was always rousing in me a counter irritation that needed for its assuaging the making of more money. I was heartily sorry for Mildred, brought up hard against my old-fashioned prejudices, which might not, I was perfectly willing to believe, fit modern shades of conduct. She wanted cousin Thomas's money, and he was craving to endow her with about all she could in decency sail under. I often, with that ironic habit my mind had, saw her sitting in a shower of checks, always lovely, always irreproachably gentle and right, and the checks all bore the name of cousin Tom.

One day on my own doorstep, when a flurry of snow seemed to offer us all the pretext for the conversation we needed to show our good-will, he stared me earnestly in the face and said: —

"Look here, I want to give Milly a car."

I thought it more comfortable to steer clear of heroics this time and take him on solid ground.

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"Oh, we can't set up a car," I said. "We're in no position. It isn't the initial cost, you know. It's everything."

"Sure," said cousin Thomas. "But it's everything I mean, chauffeur, repairs, chauffeur's board. Oh, I wouldn't give it to her without the fixings."

I looked at him, and he met my eyes in a transparent innocency. He was unconscious of having proposed anything to earn him chiding or even gratitude. I was understanding more and more indubitably every day that when he had selected Mildred as the presiding goddess of his life, he had done it for all time. I have never known anything more unswerving than the allegiance of cousin Thomas. And yet I still had not determined whether he had for Mildred a survival of that fire he had named love, or whether his peculiar nature called upon him to make good emotionally, as he had in the ways of trade.

"See here," said I, "you don't know how I hate to wet blanket all your little plans. But I can't let you give my wife a car. I can't do it myself, and I can't let you."

But looking at me from his irrefragable innocence, cousin Thomas inquired, with the air of a pioneer obligingly finding another way round: —

"Should you rather it would be a carriage and a man?"

I lifted up my voice and laughed, and the snowy street might well have echoed to the sound of it.

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"No," I said. "No, you muttonhead, you blooming idiot, neither horses nor oxen nor asses nor anything money can buy. You can say to yourself I'm a maniac if you like. I am a queer fellow. But that's the way I am. Keep your money. Fall in love with a nice girl and marry her and spend your pelf on her. We don't want it."

And as he plodded, grave, yet no less persistent, down the snowy street, I went in and divested myself of as much sleet as possible so that I might run up without delay to exchange idiotic and eccentric words with my son. For I adored my son. I even talked some bastard language to him, because plain English was insufficient for our needs, and the nurse, having seen like aberration in minds o'erthrown, suffered me. But to-day Mildred detained me, with a warmth of greeting foreign, I knew, to her equable nature, and so, though I should once have hailed it fervidly, not quite welcome to me. I did not understand my wife, and I had grown to believe in the truism that nobody understands even the creature that lives nearest him. At first it had hurt me horribly. I regarded my island of exile as a place of lonely doom. But I had acquiesced. If it was so for other men, why was it not inevitably so for me? But I had great need of tenderness from the woman who had given herself to me, and sometimes want of whirling winds of a supreme avowal that tells us we are kin to another beating heart. Yet now when she offered me warm lips I almost, save for

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shame lest I bring upon her the pang of love misprized, turned aside because, beat down the suspicion as I might, it lifted up its head and told me she was earning something. Was it her car, a thing of mechanical contrivance made by man to melt the wax on many a winged Icarus — was it for that she offered me her lips? But she asked me no questions, and I wondered whether she and cousin Thomas had been talking car.

And then in a day or two the impartial trend of circumstance seemed to offer cousin Thomas overwhelming argument for his benevolence. There was a cabman's strike, and Mildred and I had to set forth on foot and in the snow to a dinner she had pronounced upon as most important for me. She was holding up her train with difficulty under her cloak, and being very sweet and kind to me who had kept her from speeding behind her own chauffeur, and I was paying banal compliments and venturing poor jokes in the fatuous trickery of the husband who must conciliate, when, halfway upon our snowy road, we met Ellen Tracy. It struck me like a blow, the surprise of it, the incongruity of Ellen Tracy in city streets. Yet the raiment incident to them most beautifully became her, for she too was in fine lendings with chinchilla fur, and her head, nobly borne, was bare of all save that invisible crown it always wore. We came upon each other suddenly in the clear twilight and it was, for the joy it gave me, as if, within the obscuring mists of outer paradise, I had chanced upon a face beloved and lost. And her face,

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too thin, too grave, I thought in that first instant, flushed into the radiancy which is comparable to nothing but hope. And I had her hand in mine, as she let her skirt fall with a little swish of silk, and then I had named my wife, and the light went out of Ellen Tracy's face, and it challenged me with what I thought one swift glance of wonder, a white surprise as if some creature lurking unsuspected near had her at last irrevocably, and she begged of me to help. But the glance was as swift as the passing of a star, and then she was herself, my gracious lady, exchanging polished commonplaces with Mildred, who was almost agitated, in some inexplicable fashion, by the significance of the meeting. Mildred was urging her to come to see us, and naming her day at home, and Ellen Tracy was wafting her back the pretty graceful commonplaces required. Instantly I had an overwhelming desire to see her in my house and oh, wonder! to invite her eyes to rest on that small young prince of hope within it.

"Come," I found myself saying. "You must. I want you to see my son."

She looked at me gravely and smiled, a fine mysterious sort of smile, and answered gently: —

"Yes, I'll come — and see your son."

And we had touched hands again perfunctorily and had gone our own way. But Mildred did not abate her excited interest.

"You knew Ellen Tracy," she said, "and didn't tell me?"

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Why hadn't I told her? Was it too remote an interest, or was it too immediately connected with Blake and Mary, names tabooed between us.

"Where did you know her?" she insisted, and I confessed that I had carried Blake down to her house some months ago. But how did Mildred know about her? She scorned me for my dulness. Everybody knew Ellen Tracy by name, she was so rich, so well born, and so benevolent. We must have her to dinner.

And in a day or two, rather early in the afternoon, this, I guessed, to find my son awake, though she thereby might lose the chance of meeting his father, Ellen Tracy came. I was in my room, and at my window, glooming at the opposite wall and wondering about that look of hers, when I saw her cross the street to my door. I ran down and opened it to her before she could touch the bell. I felt like a boy gleefully excited, to whom Christmas has come and happy adventure and great risk.

"He's just come in," I said, and she laughed all over her face, in that way she had, understanding just what it was to me to show my son.

She mentioned Mildred with a polite little inquiry of the eyebrows, and I said: —

"Oh, yes, she's about somewhere."

I persuaded her to slip off her fur coat that made her look like a princess from far-away, and led her up the stairs. And in the big, warm room, beside the open fire, was the boy on the hearthrug, doing great feats with

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sprawling and rhetoric, while the nurse did some deed with empty dishes that had made him so content. He had just come in from the air, and his red cheeks and clear eyes were all I could desire; and when Ellen Tracy crouched and invited him and he wiggled about, as if any way were the way so it were quick enough, I felt like sending out barbaric cries like his, for joy of it. She loved the baby and the baby, even if for the warmth and sweetness of her alone, loved her back, and they did mysterious things with the language and cheek laid to cheek. She forgot me, so I thought, and seemed to find such abundant comfort in the child that I felt my eyes hot with the mysterious pity of it. And then suddenly she rose with one of her swift ultimate gestures and put by the child, he crying lustily after her, and she was gone, and I outside the door still begged her to come for a moment into my study and wait for Mildred. No, Mildred was not in, I owned, but she would be presently.

"You said — " she confronted me with those clear eyes full of reproach, and I laughed, yet not ashamed, and owned I had said it, but that was because I was afraid she wouldn't come in at all. At that she laughed indulgently, as if I were as much a child as young Egerton, still grieving up there, and whatever we both wanted was a small matter anyway.

"You are an absurd person," she said. "Yes. I'll look out of your study window."

The light was burning there, and for the first time

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I appraised it as a room calculated to please the eye. It had a big dormer looking into the western gold, and its furnishings were sumptuous and plain. I remembered now that Mildred had augmented them when a photographer came to add the print of it to his Homes of Authors. A foolish outlay I thought then, for it served me well enough with two chairs, a table, and a couch. But now I was glad, for the pure, good lines of the furnishings fitted this lady well. She walked to the window and faced the west.

"Yes," she said, in that gentle voice with the thrill in it. "I like your sky. And I like your son, Mr. Redfield. And now will you tell Mrs. Redfield, please —" She was drawing a card from the interleaving paper in its case, but I was beset by all the spirits of delay to keep her with me.

"You can't go yet," I said. "I want to tell you something."

She was holding the card now and looking at me with that grave air of waiting interest.

"Did you know," I said audaciously, "that I write books?"

"Oh, yes," said she. "I've read them. Everybody knows that."

Immediately I guessed that, reading the books, she yet thought small things of them; but the knowledge, instead of depressing, made me exhilarated to an absurd degree. Here, I said at length, were true values.

"But I've written one book you haven't read," I

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told her. "I've written a novel. And it's about you."

"About me?" The color faintly tinged her cheeks, and she looked as if she wondered whether after all I needed to be reproved.

"Yes. It's about you. It's so much about you that all through it I called you Ellen Tracy. And now I've changed the name, but it's you just the same. Will you read it? Will you do that for me?"

I fancied her breath came a little faster, and she looked perplexed and even troubled.

"Why should I read your novel?" she asked.

I found a reason. My real reason was, I think, that I wanted her to take it in her hands, to know it, to know me a little, to see I could do something that was at least sincere after my wretched makeshifts for the market-place.

"You must tell me whether it's an offence," I said, "whether the likeness is anywhere near you. Whether the people that know you would say, 'That's Ellen Tracy.'"

She seemed to consider that.

"Yes," she said. "I'll read it. But maybe I shouldn't know. We don't any of us know ourselves, they say."

"I've not made you happy," I said, in the desire I had had from the first when I was with her of telling her everything under the sun. "I made you love somebody that didn't love you. But that had to be.

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You were too proud. Your pride had to be destroyed, hadn't it Miss Tracy?"

There rushed into her face the stricken look I had seen there once before, the moment after we had met that other night. I had hurt her. How had I hurt her? Was she so intrenched in her pride that she could not bear even an imaginary moment of maiden shame? But it was gone in an instant, whatever it was, that hurt appeal, and she had righted her composure like a noble ship.

"Let me have the manuscript," she said. "Certainly I'll read it."

"It's heavy," I told her. "I'll send it to you."

To that she agreed with a slight air of relief as if, after all, I might not send it; and she told me she was going back next day to Hopeful Sands, she and aunt Patten, who adored the snow and sleeping in the balcony, and that they were to take down with them a couple of girl students who were overworked. And shortly now she was gone, and I stood in the open door looking after her, my forehead tingling with a sense of the riches that had come to my house. Halfway down the street she met Mildred, and I watched them with a foolish sense that she might return. But they separated, and Mildred came on alone, rather excited as she had been before at the nearness of so indubitable a personage, and yet irritated because Hopeful Sands would prevent Miss Tracy from dining with us for weeks to come. Mildred was showing me every day,

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with the utmost simplicity, that she prized an affiliation with men and women of high degree; and so beguiling is candor in its own ingenuousness that I found myself saying from time to time, "After all, why shouldn't she? She likes people socially equipped. Why shouldn't she run them down?"

But for the first time, I thought she did well in her pursuit.

XXIV

I SENT the manuscript to Ellen Tracy, and I also sent her a plea for Blake's bill, explaining that, awkward as it was, I begged she would help me out by rendering it. I had to see Blake, I told her, and I couldn't face him until my meddling in his affairs had been justified by her concurrence, and so on the way to being forgotten. The bill came, an actual bill, I saw with approval, a price no lower than might reasonably have been charged at any boarding-house of good standing, though, to be sure, not sanitarium prices. His pride was, at all hazards, to be saved. The bill I sent to Blake, and he mailed me a check, evidently determined to avoid a direct money transaction with her. And I sent the check to Ellen Tracy, and got back her bill, receipted, and next day, the manuscript: this also without a word. I was disconcerted. Yet, I told myself, what could she say? But to say nothing was the cut direct.

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And just then I met Blake, and he was in new clothes, a fine suit worn with bravado, and Wadham, he told me, had raised his salary, and he was that afternoon going down to Hopeful Sands. I put out my hand to him at that, and he gave it an impulsive grip. I knew what he was going for, and his answering handshake meant he acquiesced in my knowing. He was going down to ask Ellen Tracy to live on his increased salary. I plodded home feeling somehow "wee," as my mother used to say, as if I were of no particular account to anybody, and other fellows were reaping all the grain, snapping off all the flowers by their beautiful heads to garland themselves withal. And I went softly upstairs — cousin Thomas was in the library sitting upright and not talking, and Mildred was engaged in a mild patter of words that sounded consolatory of something. I went into my den, sat down at the table, and thought it over. It would be a wonder if others had not discovered about me what I was now learning about myself, — that I was a soft fellow, not even yet inured to life, not having caught the way of luck — for luck is a law though little understood — and pitifully at the mercy of my feelings. When I had been forced to deny Mildred her way, it must not be supposed I did it without payment of a very heavy cost. It hurt me like a knife to refuse her, and it was a discomfort I had to force myself to face to live with her in the ordinary ways of life after I had denied. I had yielded to her in all matters concerning us two alone. I had lived after

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the fashion that pleased her, though I had been forced, in managing it, to pour out stories until I shuddered at the output. And I could not conceal from myself that even in the matter of the stories I was on the verge of being a back number. I had sold my birthright of striving for the higher slopes, and I had gained no foothold on the steps below. I sat there touched to the soul by the dry rot and mildew of life, the consciousness that, neither in the things of the earth nor the things of the spirit had I made good. Not even in love — but when I got there, according to the loyal decency of men I went no further. Love was not the world I had foreseen in my vision, the vision that had blossomed in the Epithalamium. Yet that I accepted with the sad certainty that so all men had found it. The vision of the woman-soul — that was illusion, but it led us on, if only to this arid track where I jogged to-day. The vision of the fecund happy earth — that was another illusion, but of course everybody knew a world was fruitful because somebody dug in it and kept away the weeds. I was engaged in digging. And I drew my paper toward me and wrote the title of another story. The stories came almost full-fledged now. I scarcely had to modify them at all. I had learned the recipe. But I wished Ellen Tracy had said a word about my manuscript. Ellen Tracy! Was she, too, that blossomy air about her, that scent of sweet goodwill, was she, too, an illusion? But I had not gone far enough in my doubt to doubt that also. She shone

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above me like the fostering sun — and I wrote my story.

In about a week after this came a note from Mary. She had moved. She was in Blake's lodging-house now, and had taken a sitting-room. I could really call in proper form. I went at once, judging she needed me. It was the early evening, and I found her in the sitting-room, which seemed not to justify its pretensions. It was a rep-furnitured box lined with three-ply carpet, Mary said, with an ironic pride, and a ceiling that had once known whitewash. I had met Blake at the door, so sad a contrast to the Blake of the new clothes that I must have stared at him, for he asked sharply, — "What's the matter?" adding, "Going to see Mary? Come round to the Cheese at ten."

He strode away to his task, and I watched the back of his seedy old overcoat and the dejected slouch of his walk.

"What's the matter?" I asked Mary, when she had seated me and said she was glad I came. "Matter with Blake, I mean."

Mary seated herself opposite and gripped the tape arms of the camp chair with her two capable hands. She looked worn but, as she always did, crisp and neat in her fresh business suit that had the air of being ready to go into action. She regarded me in a grave community of concern.

"Why, she's rejected him, that's all."

"Did he tell you?"

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"No. He doesn't need to tell me."

"Well," I said.

"It was bound to come," said Mary. "I'm glad it's over."

I too was glad it was over, and in some mad way, it seemed, fortunately, rapturously, over. I had wanted Ellen Tracy to marry Blake, because it seemed as if we must all do what Blake's genius required of us; but if she could not, if she would not, if she was to be Ellen Tracy still — my blood surged and blinded me, and choked my breath.

"But he'll go under," Mary was saying. "As sure as you're a living soul, he'll go all to pieces. You step in now and take a hand."

What was I to do? I felt her maternal quality so strongly that it became not only maternal devotion and authority but all-knowingness.

"He's got to be encouraged to print his play."

"Print it? I thought he burned it."

"Yes, he did. But when I copied it, I did a carbon copy. I kept the carbon."

"Miraculous Mary!" I said. "Whatever warned you to do that?"

She answered rather wearily. I fancied she was glancing back over the long road of her service to Blake.

"Oh, I always did that with his things. He's very careless. I never knew what would happen."

"Have you saved it all, all his verse?"

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"Everything that isn't printed. After it was printed there was no sense in saving it."

I looked at her in man's perennial admiration and wonder over the fostering maternal.

"And he doesn't know it?"

"Why, no," said Mary. She seemed suddenly shy.

"I'll tell him, if you won't." I wanted, in my blundering zeal, at least to earn her his gratitude.

At that Mary went all to pieces in a way I thought she didn't know. I must not. I should do him no good. I should do her only harm.

"Very well," I said. "Don't cry, Mary, for God's sake. I should as soon expect to see a sunset crying — or a beech tree."

"They do cry," said Mary, with a touch of a smile through the tears on her lashes, "in a rain. You hear to me, Mr. Redfield. It's my secret, and you're not to tell. You've no right."

Well, I had no right; but I still badgered her to explain to me why so simple and yet so faithful a friendliness must not be disclosed. She answered with a lovely dignity.

"He wouldn't like it, that's all. I mustn't make him take favors. He can't return them."

He couldn't return them because she did them in love, and Blake couldn't love her. I heard again the muttered "Sacrilege, sacrilege," of that dark hour of Blake's downfall, and saw Mary's acceptance of his chosen distance from her.

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"Mary," I said, "you're a darling. I'll go to the Toasted Cheese and find him. And if he should happen to ask me who's his guardian angel, why, I won't tell."

She brought out from the table drawer, where she had it in readiness, the neat copy of his play. This she gave me.

"Ask him to publish it," she said. "He'll say there isn't a copy. Tell him there was an extra one lying round and you found it. Then give it to him."

"He'll suspect you. He'll know I've just come from here."

"Oh, no," said Mary, drily. "He won't suspect me. He won't think of me unless you lug me in."

But that I considered unjust. Blake did often think of her, in a tender friendliness. I left her standing there a little wan, because she was not used to tears and they took a good deal out of her, yet relieved at having set things in motion, and hurried away to the Toasted Cheese, where I found Johnnie McCann reading a poem of his own and inquiring why it wasn't as good as anybody's. It was evident that nobody was listening very hard before I came, but now they gave up listening at all, to fall on me as a stranger who after all didn't deserve a welcome because I had become a greasy citizen. How many teas did I go to in the course of an afternoon? they demanded. And did I have a sitting in a church, and was I by chance a deacon yet? I liked them so well that I probably did nothing but grin

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in answer, though I shook them off as soon as might be to get to Blake, who was sitting in a corner, patiently tutoring a little white-faced lad in the reasons why his first manuscripts hadn't been salable.

"It's too good," Blake was pelting at him. "It's too infernally good." And then, when the lad's face shone all over transfigured, as if he were avid and had never yet tasted praise, Blake added, "And it's too infernally bad. You've written after the old models. Nobody wants that now. And well they shouldn't. If you've got life in you, let it out, if you have to take your jackknife and rip up your veins to show your blood."

And the boy looked now like a hero of high resolve or a sacrificial victim led to a slaughter he adored. He took his manuscript back, said "Thank you, Mr. Blake," and went away with his consecrated look, doubtless to find a place to write in.

"How are you, Redfield?" said Blake.

He passed a hand across his forehead, but it could not smooth the knots there. I think he had forgotten having seen me before that night. I rushed pell-mell into my mission.

"Blake," said I, "aren't you going to publish your play?"

He glanced at me darkly, as a man might if his child had died and another man had used the child's name roughly.

"There isn't any play," he said. "I burned it."

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The look of remembered suffering came upon his face. The minute when he had burned the play was, I saw, forever present with him.

"There was an extra copy kicking round," I said, as bluffly as I could. "I came on it to-night. I've brought it to you."

I pulled it awkwardly forth, and laid it down before him. Who save those of us who try to climb that steep, knows the power of the written word upon the weaver of the webs of mimic life? His eyes glittered as if he were starving and saw food, his lips quivered like the lips of the man who remembers his dead love, and thinks he sees her wraith before him. He broke open the cover — now Johnnie McCann was singing a song about an Irishman who got the better of the devil — and ran over the leaves rapidly. He had been stale from work on it, I could well believe, and now, coming back to it fresh from his grind at the *Thief*, it struck him anew with all the dewy simplicity of its worth. His face gained color. He was young. And having run through it to see that none of its divinity was lost, he furled the leaves and slapped them to and confronted me, triumphant eye to inquiring eye of mine, and said: —

"Redfield, I never'll forget this of you. And Redfield, I tell you it's — it's great stuff."

Was he going to put his head down on the table and cry? Was I going to see two images of strength and potency give way in one night? But Blake was

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not that kind. He simply did up the manuscript, tied it with an artisan's care, leaned back in his seat, breathing a little faster, and still with that transfiguring color in his face, and said: —

"Dry up, Johnnie."

It was nothing to me whether Johnnie sang or held his peace. I was speculating on Blake, trying to understand. What was this thing so real that it broke his torpor of despair, that he, his heart all lovelies-bleeding, should rise to his feet at a mere hail from the Muses, ready not merely to stagger on again, but walk or run? How had I missed it, the divine worship of it, so that hearing the beat of stanzas in my ears I should hunger no more, neither thirst any more? Had I sacrificed to the wrong gods? This was something to think over. And yet I had not missed it wholly. It was ever with me, a divine regret, a *malaise*, as of him who having once heard the horn on magic mountains, thenceforth languishes sickly for its note again. But I had chosen, I told myself. I had chosen wife and child. And let who dare forswear the natural tie for immortality.

XXV

THE spring came and early summer, and I took a house in the country, with the purpose, though I knew it was ruinously extravagant, of transporting all my cumbersome household machinery there. I

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revolted at this inwardly. I didn't see why we should need to dine in such scrupulous state in the months when we had escaped the house of bondage, nor really why there must be delicate courses and silent servitors, and even the aprons I resented, they were of such a gloss. Besides, I was scared at the expense of it all, and I drifting every day nearer the status of a back number. But when I asked Mildred if she wasn't going to be a sport and come into the wilderness with me for one summer — I ached for a tent and the taste of fish scorched over the coals — she looked at me in a mild surprise and asked if I didn't want Egerton to be within reach of a doctor, and if I thought you could live too comfortably for a growing child. Well, I thought you could; I remembered there were brown, happy children that played naked in the sand, and never had their temperatures taken. Yet he was my child, and I was as fond and foolish over him as doating father ever managed to be; and we were civilized and not savages, and since she told me to be afraid, I was as afraid as she. And just as we had accomplished the moving of our equipage, I had an exceedingly good offer to go to England on some investigating for Rees and Dresser. I suspected they were tired of my Little Italy, and had cast about for some live job to put me on. When I got the letter I had time, on the way upstairs to Mildred, to go quite daft over it. I was to see England, and she would see it with me. To my unbounded surprise

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striking athwart my pleasure, she would not go. Was it the boy? We should take him too, of course.

"Let the house go hang," I said. "We can sublet or shut it up and pay the rent" — but here she stopped me.

It was not the boy. But he and she would stay quietly in New England. It was better for him. And to that I reconciled myself, really because I must, and also because there was no time to gainsay anything, such was the haste of my departure. And like a dream the good-bys were over and I was on blue water and mad with freedom and delight. What did I mean by the freedom I rejoiced in? Not freedom from her and my dear son. I was bound to them every day with triple-plaited cords, by the fibres of habit, by the tyrannical strands of fostering duty. I had made my life, and I would not have it otherwise: yet I was free. Mildred had summoned an ancient aunt from somewhere in the middle west to bear her company. The hypothetical aunt, I called her: for I had never guessed of her until this exigency, and if I had not heard cousin Thomas also refer to her as aunt Rule, I shouldn't have been able to visualize her at all. He hadn't the imagination for a hypothesis. Her name predicted that she was of his lineage.

If anybody seeing me on that fairy voyage afterward remembered me, it must have been as a dazed, cranky fellow, wild with the sea, and boorish in his inattention to the rules of the sea-going game. I

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tramped and stared. When we got into port I was starved for sleep. The night had put her spell on me, and the stars I had forgotten in my city toil. And then England, beneficent, our mother, adored with every inner fibre of us, England took me to her breast, and I swore, in the first week, I would "return no more." Mildred and the boy should come over, and we would live on our enthusiasms. This I wrote to her, but she replied at once that it wasn't to be thought of. I already had a position in America. To abandon it with no hope of making a new way was unpardonable folly. So I did my two months' work to the tune of all the accumulated memories in me, and, last act of my happy stay, made pilgrimage to Kent where Egerton Sims was born. I found it, the house, immemorially old, and full of dignity. The owner was not at home. Perhaps I should not have presented myself to him as in any way demanding special recognition if he had been. But I went into the church and saw the Egerton tombs and the recumbent ancestors my friend had told me of, and only when I put my name in the visitors' book at the house did I permit myself to write after my name, "Trinidad." I think I vowed something over those Egerton graves: perhaps it was a vow of fealty to him, my feudal lord, and perhaps it concerned my son. The thought of my son was very strong upon me in those days, because I was turning toward home, and now the West drew me as potently as the East had done. And

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when I stepped on board the steamer, homeward bound, I heard a voice that moved me like a call to things beloved: Ellen Tracy's voice, and it stirred me, I believed, not only because she was such a lady paramount, but because she was a part of home and the things to be. There she stood on deck, a Viking's daughter, clad in blue, the proud serenity of her air, the wholesome well being of her, such as in no other woman I had seen. The others might have come from mountain climbing or the tonic of the sea, but beside her they paled. She was simply life, life of the body, life of the mind and soul, concentrated will and movement and delight. All this I thought before I got to her among the high-voiced groups, and I almost put my hand on the arm of her blue coat, I was so glad. But aunt Patten saw me, she in a particularly obstinate bonnet, insisted on in loyalty to the olden time, and in a laughable contrast to some Parisian mantle that had taken her eye. I was to find out that this was aunt Patten's sartorial line. Her life was a series of ardent impulses and old devotions, and she would wear the latest thing in stubborn company with an ancient preservation. Aunt Patten was delighted, plainly. She liked young men. Not that I was so callow then, but sufficiently young by contrast with the long avenue of her recollections.

"Ellen," she said, grasping my hand decisively in her small one, "Ellen, do you see?"

Ellen turned, but just then others surged between,

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and when we could really meet, I found Miss Tracy was greeting me rather gravely and with a composure almost stiff. But aunt Patten talked for two. She was delighted to see me, so she said. I reminded her of her native land. Let her once get back to her native land, and you'd see whether she'd leave it again. She'd no doubt she should adore Europe if she could ever find it in its ordinary clothes, not overrun by a million Americans and spouting tea at every pore.

"But you want to get back to your Americans," her niece reminded her. She had the air of treating her like a much indulged child.

Oh, Americans were well enough in their habitat, said aunt Patten. It was only when they began to scurry over Europe, staring at things, that they made her nervous. And was that her trunk going by? She should perish if she couldn't get at her chinchilla — and so talking, they left me, with a quiet little bow, too formal, I thought, from Ellen Tracy.

It proved that we were not neighbors at table, and they didn't appear on deck that night. The meeting had left me thoughtful. Miss Tracy was not on the ground where I had left her. This, I felt with a tendency to reproach, was not fair. Where was the old familiar intercourse of Hopeful Sands? It was almost as if she had some reason for repulsing me. What had I done? Was it the matter of the novel? That I would boldly ask.

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It was two full days before she came on deck, and then aunt Patten, a limp wraith of a creature, clung to her, and after a stoical twenty minutes had to be carried down again. This I did — she was a feather weight — and all the time she kept up a protesting motion of her hand, an action which meant, she told me afterward, that I was not to speak to her. If anybody spoke, she said, to her, to anybody, she was prepared to die. And it was another full day before Ellen Tracy appeared again; but when I saw her pacing the deck with a lithe swiftness that means the delight in freedom, I made for her at once, and asked if I might walk with her. She accepted me, rather as an infliction, I thought, and we strode on, equally alive to the glory of the tumbling waves under us and the taste of the spray-wet breeze. If she had resentment against me she couldn't hold it in the face of such a day, and presently we were talking fast: about Mildred first. I had to tell where I had left her and the boy, and whether they were well. It wasn't simulated, this interest of hers, to fulfil the canons of accepted life. She really cared to know how Mildred was. She really cared about the boy. After I had fatuously rehearsed some of the boy's precocious aptitudes, I did have the grace to own my common failing with the world of fatherhood. Yet he was my boy, and of course he did seem different.

"Of course," she said. "He's splendid."

And I believed she had seen him so. I told her

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incidentally what I had been doing in England, and she warmed to that and said it was wonderful that now every man was a citizen of the world. He wasn't fighting isolated problems in his own corner. He was covering land and sea to find out what other men did. She quite glowed over that. I fancied she would like an adventurous wandering, and she owned as much. Only she wasn't willing to get very far from aunt Patten. By the time the sunset came, and we had talked about sailing into the golden west with the old adventurers, I felt we were really very good friends indeed. Her early stiffness had gone, and when it seemed in danger of coming back, I found I could dissipate it, for some unknown reason, by a mention of Mildred and the child. And after dinner I sought her again very far forward in a dark spot of her own. The wind had come up, and few were on deck, the major part preferring the stuffy seclusion of the music room and a dissonant clamor of popular songs. The moon was out, and the waves were breaking in foam. What with the motion of the water and the flying clouds and the wind on our faces, we seemed to be racing. I found a high excitement in it and so, I think, did she. I was in accord with it, daring enough for anything, and so I said: —

"What made you send back my manuscript without a word?"

She was silent so long that I doubted whether she was going to answer at all. The cloaked figure be-

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side me grew to be an inscrutable one that might never speak. Suddenly when I was listening for a word, a little whip of her hair got loose and lashed me across the cheek. That seemed a kind of answer, and the thought pounced on my quieter consciousness that if it did it again I should like to take it in my teeth and hold it there. And I laughed, with something savage in the feel of the laughter, and for this I was not prepared.

"What is it?" she said. "Why did you laugh?"

It was impossible to meet her with small subterfuges. You felt she understood everything and would understand, and your soul could walk before her unashamed.

"Your hair," I said. "It hit me like a whip."

Instantly she did some furling of her headgear, and I repented of my honesty: for I should have liked the little whip to flick at me again.

"I didn't write to you," she said at length, as if it were the statement of a fact I asked for.

"No, I know you didn't. Why didn't you?"

She didn't seem to know, and in a moment she said that exactly.

"I don't really know."

"Did you think I had made a portrait of you?"

She hesitated.

"I could see you had tried."

"But was it a good portrait? That's what I asked you to tell me. Would anybody, — would aunt

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Patten, for instance, looking at it, have said, 'That's very like'?"

She laughed a little, suddenly.

"Mr. Redfield," she said with a delightful candor, "the woman is tremendously charming. She charmed even me. And I read the book with the greatest prejudice in the world."

"You did? Why, now?"

"Because you said she was like me. So I was pretty nervous over it. I expected to meet all my faults."

"And did you?"

"No. The creature hadn't one."

"There!" I cried, in an unreasoning triumph, as if I had proved something. "You see."

"She hadn't a fault. But the way she was like me was in little tricks, the way I feel things, the inside part of me."

"So she was like you. Now why couldn't you say that at the time?"

"It was puzzling. She seemed a portrait of the me I thought nobody knew but me. I don't know that I'd ever seen that me before. I don't believe I think about myself so very much. But there she was. I got quite embarrassed with her."

I was in high triumph. At last I had done something that nature itself owned for faithfulness.

"Was that all the reason you wouldn't talk about her?" I persisted. "She was too like — too beautiful to fit your humility?"

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"No," she said, "it wasn't all."

I could hear no niceties of tone in her voice, what with the rush of water and the small tumult of the wind. She might have been indifferent or she might have been subtly moved and yet bent from necessity on making me hear.

"What was it, then?" I asked, and she made no answer. "Had I made you angry?" I insisted. "Had I somehow hurt your pride? You're very proud, you know."

"Am I?" she said, perhaps wistfully. "You said that before. Am I proud?"

"Wasn't the woman in the book proud?"

"I didn't see it. She seemed to behave just as she must behave in the circumstances, that's all."

"You see," said I, again from my triumph. "It only seemed natural to you. So you see you would have behaved in just that way. Yes. She was proud. And you're proud, too, I can tell you."

She murmured something that sounded like, "Dear me!" and I imagined the tone was one of concern.

"Come," I said, "there was another reason. What was it?"

The moon came out divinely from the flying fleece, for the bright purpose, it seemed to me, of lighting Ellen Tracy's face for me to read. And it was sad, not passionately so, but patiently, as if with a sadness she had accepted. It was thoughtful, too.

"I ought to have written," she said. "I see that.

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I didn't fully realize it meant something practical to you. You want to publish the book. You wanted to see whether it offended me. It doesn't. Publish it, by all means."

But I felt I must know more, not for the book's sake, but somehow for my own.

"And it didn't make you angry?" I persisted.

"Oh, no."

"But" — I knew this — "it made you sad."

A touch of the pride I had accused her of came into her port here. She lifted her head with a little toss and then, perhaps because she had been so accused, abased it.

"It's a beautiful book," she said conclusively, with an impersonal kindliness, and I knew I was to approach no nearer to her inner mind. But that was heaven to hear.

"Is it a beautiful book?" I cried. "Do you really think so?"

"I know so."

She was answering with the indulgence of one who saw what praise would mean to the workman and was willing to accord him generously his due. Yet no more than his just due. Art was too sacred to her. She would not demean it by the tinsel showers of flattery. An enormous hunger, a great egotism, possessed me, and I craved knowing just where she put me among men.

"But you don't think my other work was beautiful?"

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I dared. "You said you'd read it. There's no beauty there."

She paused. I knew why. It was because she was so kind.

"You mustn't trust to me," she said, at length. "I'm no critic."

"But you know!" I was sure that out of the integrity of her life, the sanity and dutifulness that had never once let her accept a show for substance, from her sensitiveness, too, she was the truest critic. "You know, and so do I. My books are rot."

"No." She was glad to combat me. "It's work a lot of people care about. They care for it tremendously. I've been asking people since I knew you, and I assure you they do care."

"The doctor who says he can't read tragedy? He sees enough of that in real life. The broker that says he wants something pleasant to take his mind off?"

I spoke laughingly, but, to my own surprise, with bitterness. I knew exactly where my stories stood before the god of work. I thought far worse of them than she would let herself say; but when she did even so lightly reflect my scorn of them, a great bitterness rose in me and tinged the words. It was strong and I could taste it. They were fakes, those stories; but so much time had gone to the making of them!

"Not all," she said gently. "Aunt Patten loves them."

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"Well," I said, in my ironical self-scorn, "I shall write henceforth to boil the pot as usual — and to please aunt Patten."

She had retreated from the rail, as if she meant to leave me, but I could see she had also, perhaps with purpose, turned so that the moon no longer had dominion. Her face in shadow, she said, as if it had to be, because she had hurt me, and yet there was no way of saying it: —

"Mr. Redfield, if you did only one thing in a lifetime like the poem, the Epithalamium, it would be enough."

My eyes were hot with tears, not unworthy tears of a hurt pride, but love of her sweet kindliness.

"Did you read it?" I asked absurdly, for of course she had.

"The other day. I couldn't read it twice," she said, with a little broken laugh. "It is so sacred, so sacred to you — to life. It's — it's like holy books that only the priests can read. Good-night."

She had thought she comforted me by that high praise, but I stood there bleeding inwardly at knowing what she must think of me for imprinting my living heart on a magazine page.

XXVI

The next day I did not see her until we were nearing port, and my hunger for her grew until I could

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scarcely tolerate my own fretful company. The day's programme, walking the deck, a smoke, a parley with men — for there were good fellows on board — these were only nervous irritants. What was I doing, I asked myself in the midst of them, letting the time slip when Ellen Tracy was in reach of my voice, and after this I might meet her no more? I saw her at the dinner table though I had to turn to do it, thereby deflecting my neighbor's commonplaces because she judged rightly I was not listening. There sat Ellen Tracy with her air of attentive calm, her small, beautiful head in what I called its pose of pride. She wore a black dress that showed her neck, and there was the sparkle of yellow gems about her throat. I felt the tempestuous rising in my own throat when I looked at her that once. It was enough, for now I could carry the picture of her in my innermost mind, and I turned to my huffy neighbor and placated her, beginning the talk again cheerfully. I had thought of a foolish way for seeing Ellen Tracy again that night. I would put my will on hers and call her up on deck. For a moment of hot fancy that seemed valiant doing; and then my blood cooled and I remembered that what shines like temerity in one mood is sheer moonshine in another. So I rose early from my seat and went over to her as she was leaving hers. A new look, vivid and yet not comprehensible to me, leaped into her face when she saw me. But she greeted me with her careful courtesy, and I said at once: —

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"Won't you come on deck?"

She hesitated, and mentioned aunt Patten, as if she caught at aunt Patten for a reason. Then, to my own bewilderment, but inevitably, I found myself commanding her.

"Get your coat," I said. "I'll meet you where we were before."

She went out of the saloon without a word, and I ran for my cap and a rug for her and did meet her, not where I had said, but at the head of the companion way. I took her to a sheltered place where there were the chairs I had ready, and I was at last content. Ever since our talk of the night before, I had thought of her with a great longing and hope. That was it. My hope was in her. If anybody could drag me out of the mire where I stuck with my Christian's pack of bad literature on my shoulders, it was she, because she had clarity, and to be honest was an article of her faith. She might not know how to show me the road to Parnassus itself, but she would at least let me look in the clear mirror of her appreciation and see how little I satisfied her. We are very like children, we men, when we come on a creature that draws and dominates us as the mother soul alone can do. Why should I not be dominated and led? The mother soul knew the way, and without her I could not find it. But I began, not about myself but about Blake, perhaps because reference to the tribunal of just judgments inevitably included him.

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"Blake's book is coming out," I said.

"Yes," she answered unguardedly. "He wrote me."

Ah! I thought, and so he writes you. He has not given up the quest. And out of some pang it gave me — I should have said then because I wanted to stand so near them both and it hurt me to be ignorant of their relation to each other — out of this I spoke roughly: —

"Are you in love with Blake?"

"No," she said as quickly, in a short and sharp reprisal drawn from her, I knew, because I had pounced. "How can you?" she added, in an instant compunction, "How can you make me say it?"

This gave me a delicious sense of power.

"Did I make you say it?" I asked, in a small triumph I was at once ashamed of. But I would not forego it. "He'll make you love him," I challenged her. "He'll make you marry him."

She was silent for a moment, and I knew she was getting hold of herself. It was a high game, and I was light-headed, but I did not feel that I was wrong. It had turned, this big desire of mine to know whether she would have me forswear my work, into the game of sex. And now she answered lightly, and in a way that said, "Stand off, you other mind, you other soul:" —

"This kind of talk isn't very profitable."

I saw I had lost ground with her, the ground I had unwittingly won last night, and I cursed myself for

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the foolery of being misled by racing blood. And I said the only thing that could be said, "Forgive me."

She didn't answer that, but with a thought of her own dignity, perhaps, that would not let her leave the topic, went back to Blake.

"You've read his play," she said. "I know you have, for he wrote me it was through you it's coming out."

"No," said I, "that's all Mary." And I went on and told her what Blake must never know: how Mary had kept his nurslings under her warm wing lest they suffer lack.

She was quick to answer.

"Ah, that's dear of her, that's dear. But it's the kind of thing she'd do. I haven't given up hope of getting her to stay with me this winter. I think I can."

"I don't know," I said. "She thinks Blake needs her."

Then she surprised me.

"I can't tell whether it makes me impatient or whether it doesn't," she said, "to have her pouring out her blood for him."

"But you said," I reminded her, "when he broke down, you know — you said his genius had to be kept alive at any cost. Well, so Mary thinks."

"I don't know," said she. "Sometimes I think genius is a heaven-descended thing. And then again —"

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"Then again?"

"Why, I think it's only a tremendous aptitude, and if it gives a man a sense of privilege, if it conjures up a big temptation! What would it profit Blake to write a song — a song —"

"The song the morning stars sang together," I prompted her.

"Yes, that song, if he smashed Mary's life and strung his harp out of her heart-strings?"

"But you must remember he doesn't want to break her heart," I said. "We've got to be fair to him. He's found her heart under his feet, millions of times, and picked it up gently and given it to her. I've seen him do it."

"Isn't it wretched?" she said, and there were tears in her voice. "Isn't it cruel? And Mary is the softest thing, the most vulnerable. If she loves you, you can hurt her with a breath."

"Blake can't hurt her," I denied. "She's got beyond that. She's simply the watch upon his path, the messenger to do his errands. No, he can't hurt her, because there isn't a thing she expects from him or, after all, a thing she'd take."

"It's splendid, isn't it?" she owned. "Will it ever be any different?"

"Will he ever love her, do you mean? You ought to be the one to tell me that."

She answered in a sudden royal exasperation with me for my persistency.

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"Well, then, I do tell you. He never will love her. And if he offered her any of those expediencies men do, a home, an affection, loyalty," — her voice dropped here as if in awe over what a woman might renounce — "why, Mary wouldn't take it, that's all."

"You think she'd stick for the big thing or nothing?"

"Yes. If she could marry him and be a kind of mother and upper housemaid to him, she would. But if she thought he was trying to give her things he hasn't got to give — no, Mary wouldn't have them."

"You think Mary's great stuff."

"Oh, it isn't for herself so much. It's for him. She wouldn't have him debase the currency. The minute he did — why, I believe she'd kill herself, or run away. She'd know she'd hurt him."

And all this showed me that, if Blake was such a knight peerless, here was the woman for him, comprehending, a light upon the bosom of life. I said it daringly.

"The more you talk about them, the more I see you're the only woman Blake could possibly love."

"Oh, no, I'm not," she said wearily. I fancied I could see in the weariness vistas of sad, perplexing thought over this very thing. Could she or could she not? "I'm a million miles away from him. I adore him just as you do, — as Blake; but for the rest, I'm a million miles away."

Then I found myself saying hotly on the heels of her speech: —

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"Then it's because you love another man."

"Yes," she said in a tired tone, and sad, oh, infinitely sad, "it's because I've loved another man." And here she laughed, not mirthfully, but as if the laugh came because she had need of it and called it. "You're absurd. Why must it be because I've loved another man? Must any woman love your Blake if she's not bespoke?"

"You must," I said, angry with her and myself, I knew not why. "You're a mad enthusiast about him. You could have taken one more step, and there you'd be. But you've filled your heart up with another man."

I spoke brusquely, and she answered in a soft reproof.

"Tell me, don't you think there's any more in love than — that?"

"That" weighed nothing when she said it, a scornful gossamer cast to the winds. And I forgot I was married to a woman whom, I had thought in that earlier spring, it had been heaven's intention I should love.

"No," I said, "I don't believe it."

"You don't believe love is destiny?"

"No."

"You don't believe if you had once felt it you would be — immune, I'll say, till you and she met a million years from now?"

"No."

"Poor child," she breathed. "Poor child."

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I wondered if she meant me; the words were sweetly tender. And yet she might. Her compassion embraced the earth, and for aught I knew, the stars. And I sat there, quivering under some sense of revolt against life that had the power to make it seem other than it was, that could generate in us such beliefs, show us such entrancing visions, and then, when we had fulfilled its purposes, let the leaves fall and disclose to us the bare, ugly trellises of our arbor of delight. But while I thought thus, there came upon me that sensation I had felt once before, of intimate communion with Ellen Tracy, of a perfect understanding that might well make us both laugh at the chances of space and time.

"Tell me," I said. Without my will I said it, yet everything in me was so acquiescent to our intercourse that I saw no reason why it should not be said. "Tell me," I said again, "do you remember?"

"What?" She asked it clearly, yet I felt she was approaching with me a barrier she was afraid to near, and that she saw it as I did not. But she had evidently determined that it was better to look upon the barrier together in order not to take that step again.

"Do you remember that day," I said, "when I asked you if we had known each other before?"

"Yes." She might have been reassuring a child, so patient was her tone.

"Where was it?" I stumbled on. "Where were we?"

"Why," she said, "we were as we are now."

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As we were then. Where were we? In a beautiful place, my thankful heart told me, in a safe place, for it could be entered by no one but us two.

"Is it a garden?" I asked her.

The moon was coming now, in a heavenly sky. There was singing below, the foolish gregarious pastimes of the world that loves the artificial habits it has made. We two were alone in our garden and the world. She was speaking gravely, but a thrill shot through her voice.

"I do believe we've known each other before. But we mustn't think of it. It's not — not healthy."

"Did it frighten you the other time?" I asked her, and she answered without hesitation, "Yes."

"Do we go away?" I groped, "out of our bodies?"

"Don't think of it," she bade me, earnestly. "Our bodies were given us to live in. We simply mustn't think of going out of them."

"Tell me," I persisted. "Was it ever so before with you?"

"What do you mean?"

She was putting off my question, I could see, and yet I meant to have it answered.

"We'll say we've gone into a garden. It seems like that to me. Did you ever go there — or anywhere — like this, with anybody else?"

She waited a long time, and I seemed to know what she was thinking. It was, as we are assured in dreams of our best beloved, that we may be our kindest, our

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truest, our most loving, and it will not be misunderstood.

"No," she said slowly. "It has been so with nobody else. I don't understand it. I can't. But I don't think of it. I mustn't. And you mustn't. The only thing we can think is that we've seen — we see — how — splendid things are. And now," her voice broke a little, into a laugh half tears, "I'm going down to aunt Patten."

She seemed, rising, to take me with her out of our paradise.

"But where am I going?" I said, not knowing how I could let her leave me.

"We're all going home as fast as we can go," said the kind voice. "I'm going with aunt Patten, and you're going to Mildred and your son."

With that she went away, and with her the last ray of supersensual light had left me. I knew she said "Mildred," though she had never called her so, because she wanted to bring her remindingly near.

XXVII

After that, I had no chance to see her at all; only to do her some slight service in the matter of the custom-house and a carriage, and she said good-by to me with a tranquil sweetness that left me, too, at ease. So full was I of unspoken certainties of the biggest sort that I should have been a child to whimper. I felt

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grounded in some hope, poised in the equal balance of just and noble things. Indeed, I hardly know how to tell the scope and measure of my changed mind. It was simply inseparable from my knowing Ellen Tracy, and I was the more a man.

I sped down to the Port, trying to recall myself to the fact that Mildred and my son were there, for everything seemed strange to me. America, too, looked strange, its bright, lambent air, the sharp outlines and raw expedients. At the Port I drove up to the ample house we had taken, and Mildred met me at the steps. She was very thin. In her dress of a strange gray-blue she was also lovely in a remote way; and yet, as I kissed her, it was with a shock, as if she were a stranger.

"Where is he?" I kept saying while we walked in, my arm about her. Now, so near my son, I was afraid to delay another second, lest, having waited for me so long, he should have gone off into some land of everduring loss. "He's well, Mildred? Just say he's well."

"Oh, yes," she told me, in her even voice, "he's well, but he got his shoes full of sand and nurse is taking them off."

I heard a voice above, a peremptory voice of one to whom sandless shoes were less than lunch delayed, and I ran upstairs and snatched my boy to my arms, and he roared at me and fought me, and I liked his passion, and we had a great old time together. The nurse laughed, and Mildred came and tried to recall him to

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his more praiseworthy self; this I didn't permit, and after we had fought, he accepted me, and then I left him to his lunch and was roared after because now he liked me well.

When Mildred and I were seated at table in the cool seclusion of an eastern room — and it was wonderful to see what a low note she always managed in a house, what quiet service, what trim maids, what a subduing of necessary light — I seemed to miss something I had expected to see.

"Oh," I said, "where's aunt Rule?"

"She went to-day," Mildred told me, "back to the West."

"And where's cousin Thomas? You haven't spoken about him at all."

"Haven't I?" said Mildred. She was fanning herself, and I noted the slenderness of her delicate wrist, and interrupted her reply to ask: —

"Aren't you well? You're awfully thin."

Oh, yes, she was well, she told me. The heat had rather worn on her. Besides, there'd been a good deal of social life.

"Social life!" I repeated. How far it seemed, after my knocking round among men and then the intimate solitudes of the sea to this little world of eating food in special clothes. "I should think summer was the time to escape that sort of thing."

"There are very good people down here," she said, still wearily. "I've made you some valuable friends."

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"Well," said I, "where's cousin Thomas?"

"He's here."

"Here, at the Port?"

"At the Hillsdale House. Though he had been staying with us a good deal, till aunt Rule went."

"Till to-day." I must have said it satirically, for I felt it so.

"He's left his car here," she threw in, and now she did not look at me.

"Had it here all summer?"

"Yes."

"Leave it here for you to use?"

"Yes."

"Chauffeur goes with it, I suppose."

"Of course," said Mildred, plucking up a tone more matter of fact. "I can't run a car. I knew you couldn't, either."

"No," I said, "certainly I couldn't." And the devil put it into my mind to add, "Certainly not cousin Thomas's car." I was not so touchy as to balk at any man who might have loved my wife; of cousin Thomas with his persistencies I did have a perennial distrust.

But that I did not say, and while we waited for a course unduly delayed, if I could judge from the slight deepening of the new line between Mildred's brows, I watched her because I felt I had to. I could do it with no challenge of blush or answering gleam from her. She was tired, and there was, in meeting me, some slight strain. She was changed. Was it to my outer

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or my inner eyes? I might even have called her haggard, if the line of her cheek and chin had not charmed the eye to its deception, the low-toned coloring and the lovely hollows with their soft, pathetic shadows had not offered their own beguiling.

"I've brought you some aqua marines," I said. "And some jade. I'm going to hang you all over with jewels like a squaw."

A faint rose came into her cheeks and she gave me a little, smiling nod. And presently, when we left the table, I put my arm again about her, and asked her if she wouldn't come up and show me where she meant me to write. She agreed, perhaps rather too patiently, and we went up to a long, low western room where the sun came sweetly through diamond panes. And after we had talked a little about my voyage and I had opened my trunk, I hung all the trinkets about her neck as I had foretold, and she sat down to take them off again for closer seeing, and fingered them in the light and let it run through them in little rivers. Her face lighted too, to match them, and I had to say to her:—

"You're an awfully pretty woman. Anybody ever tell you so?"

She laughed, and I laughed, and we seemed to be only a short way from that courting time gone by; only I was conscious that a part of me sat there dispassionately unmoved, while another part of me paid compliments to reward the pretty creature who had put on her poetic gown to please me.

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"Come, talk," I said. "We haven't had a good old gossip for a long time. Sit here."

I wheeled up a big chintz chair to the window and myself stretched out on a divan there. The steamer was still beating in my blood and I carried in my memory — in my body, too, I felt — the strong savor of the sea. I felt a careless certainty of my own strength. We all know what that is when we have come back from the farther intimacies of the earth and air. I felt equal to throwing the light burden of my woman on my shoulder and taking her with me, if she wouldn't choose to go, where I at last saw it was best we should be. For since the night when Ellen Tracy and I had talked of my work, I knew what must befall it. There must be no more stories of Little Italy. I must write out of my deepest integrity, though I starved to do it, and it would be to my wife's honor if she starved with me. There was the child: he should be brought up to coarse, clean tasks, even though he lost dancing school with others' sons well placed. Thinking of that, I laughed and Mildred lifted her brows inquiringly.

"I was thinking," I said, "that young Egerton will probably have to be an expressman or a plumber."

She let the stones ripple through her hands and asked me idly, as knowing it was a part of the chaff I affected when I was ill at ease with her: —

"What do you mean by that?"

It was a poor time to pelt her with discontents, now I had just come home; but I was at my bravest,

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she was at her prettiest, and I felt she could understand.

"Mildred," I said, "I've been thinking a lot of things."

"When?" she asked, so appositely that I was comically brought up with my own haste.

Last night, it had all been since last night. But that I couldn't stay to answer.

"Do you know," said I, "I'm an awful fake?"

She shook her head slightly. Her eyes gathered a shade of distaste.

"My stories," said I, "aren't worth the paper they're written on."

"You get better prices," said she, instantly, "than all but three men in this country. I know, for one of the firm was on from New York, dining here, and he told me."

I couldn't stop to fight that stuffed image of an argument. I rushed on pell-mell, sure I saw before me the gleam of the path I had never yet traced quite clearly.

"I've got to work at a different sort of thing. Maybe I can't sell anything at all. Maybe I can't even work without sitting on the eggs till they're addled, I'm so stale. No, they're so stale and I'm such an old, old hen. But no more pot-boiling, no more fakes."

The look in her face, which I sought honestly, seemed to be of an unfeigned annoyance. "Here," it said, "are you when everything has been perfectly clear for two months, muddying up the stream."

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I tried another tack. Because I felt it all so keenly, this new-discovered path, because an almost awful earnestness was on me to take the road now I saw it, I said chaffingly: —

"Mildred, don't you want me to be a great man?"

"Yes," she said without hesitation. "Have you found some other opening in England? You thought you would."

"Well, you know," said I, in a foolish, pedagogical fashion, "the great men don't inherit this earth. They inherit another. They don't have houses and lands and limousines" — at that instant, as if it were a play and the sound came appositely, I heard a motor whirling out of the yard. "What's that?" I asked.

"It's cousin Tom's car. It's going to meet him at the train."

"Does he keep it here?" I interrupted my flow of idealism to ask, with a childish annoyance of which I was ashamed.

"Oh, yes. There's so much room," she answered instantly.

I went on, but the wind of my intent had died, and my sails dropped dolorously.

"I don't know whether I can ever do anything very good or not. I don't know whether it's in me. But I've got to try."

Her forehead was a labyrinth of lines. I thought immediately she must have had anxieties while I was gone, the fair map of her face had changed so grievously,

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even if so subtly. I hurried on now: for if compunction came into it, I was lost, and could never make my run at all.

"Mildred," said I, "we've got to live on less."

It was a shock, I saw, but she met it steadily.

"How much less?" she asked.

"I don't know. It's got to be a different scale altogether."

"Have you lost money?" she inquired. The delicate pink my first facer had brought was augmented by a shade.

"No, no. I shall have quite a pocketful. I've come home with all my wages, like a good boy. But after this, I want to live simply. I want to get up in the morning without feeling I've got to earn just so much money before night."

"I thought all men felt that," said she, with an eminent common sense. "I thought they had to."

"So they do. So do I have to; but I want to strike on luxuries. Don't you see?"

"People will say you're not doing as well. They'll think you're a back number. You've said that yourself."

So I had. I was always forecasting the moment when my miserable little fictions would pall on a public waiting to get something real from the new giants sure to be born.

"I don't care what they say," I threw out, in terms of an old futility. I had a sudden vision of the sacri-

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fices men had made to write what they would, paint what they would, how they had slept without knowing they had slept at all, because waking vision pressed so hard upon sleep and sleep gave way to vision, how they had lived upon pulse and water. "Mildred," I said, and I felt my throat choking up, "Mildred, it's an awful stunt. It's a big, brave deed. You do it with me."

"What do you mean to do?" she asked, and the lines between her brows tightened themselves by a shade, and her eyes besought me not to withhold the worst.

"I want to write one line," I said, out of the bathos of my belated dreams, "just one line that's good enough to live."

"Why can't you sit down in your chair in your comfortable study and write it?" she asked practically.

"The study costs too much," I said. "The whole outfit costs too much. When I sit in that study I know the expensive cook downstairs is making expensive *entrées* I've got to pay for. And you can't write undying lines with that kind of a whip held over you."

Mildred fished up a neat illustration from her school days.

"Doctor Johnson," said she, "wrote 'Rasselas' to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral."

"Did he?" I retorted flippantly, out of the passion of my desire. "Well, did you ever read 'Rasselas'?"

"I don't believe anybody could carry on a house like

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ours any more economically than I have done it," she said.

"I know it, dear," I made haste to own. "You're a wonder. That's the point. It's too big a house. We must live in a smaller one."

She looked suddenly so full of extreme misery of a controlled sort, that I was bitterly sorry for her, and wondered if the undying line ought really to be bought at such a price. She spoke, and the tone seemed to bite me.

"Do you mean," she said, "that we're to live on a street like — like the street where you were when I first knew you?"

"No, no," I told her eagerly. "I'd thought we might go into a suburb."

"And live among people that have baby carriages standing in the front hall?"

Her tone told me that this was the acme of squalor.

"Egerton won't need a carriage much longer," I blundered on in my poor armor of facetiousness. "So we needn't have a carriage in our hall."

Mildred looked then from the window at the lovely, wide prospect with the line of sea for its objective. Her face hardened like a fine mask.

"I think," she said, "you must be crazy."

Perhaps I was; but of this madness of creative fervor had come certain things in the world by which alone the world has lived. "Do you expect me," she asked, "to keep a servant?"

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"Yes, oh, yes," I assured her out of my humility at having made her suffer. "I should think we might have two. And there'd be a vegetable garden, and I'd work in it."

This last was a tinsel touch, but my idyl needed it only to strike her to the soul. She looked down at her delicate hands, holding the forgotten gems. The light of day lay on her rosy, glistening nails. Those hands seemed to me the frailest things and yet the most invincible. A man might have to spend his soul to keep them white. A mad fancy came into my mind that perhaps such hands were whitened by men's blood, and the slender fingers were strong enough to wring the heart they held and squeeze out more and more.

If marriage, the living together in an iron bond, teaches us anything, it is that there is a decent control which must be snatched at as soon as certain danger signals fly. Mildred had on her armor now of gentle speech and a composed face, and I, too, got a firmer grip.

"I might as well tell you," she said, in that mastered voice, "that I never shall do it. Never."

"You won't go with me into my suburban pram-infested villa?" I asked, from my foolish last resort of gayety.

"No."

"Suppose I go?" This was in idle rallying. "Suppose I take Egerton?"

"I should keep up the house," she replied instantly.

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"I shall never leave you actually. People could think you had gone into the country to write."

"How could you keep up the house?" was my involuntary inner comment on this. "How could you keep it unless I kept it for you?"

But this I could not ask her. I got up and went to her in a contrite haste.

"Never mind, old darling," I said. "We'll talk of it again."

"No," said she firmly, and she gave me her cheek, not grudgingly, but as if it were a fair, bloom-covered tract I had purchased. "I shan't talk about it again. I've said all I have to say."

A magnificent car came up the drive, and looking at it absently, my hand still on her shoulder in a caress the shoulder was too patient to shake off, I saw cousin Thomas sitting in it, smaller than ever in his summer clothes and a large and doubtless invaluable panama. He seemed, looking down upon him as I did, to have shrunken somehow. I gave him a robust, "Halloo!" conscious of all the ways I had of disappointing Mildred and determining that coolness to cousin Thomas should not make one of them this time. Though he glanced at me, he made no response in kind, but left the car and came up the stairs. He was the same little terrier of a man, but worn, inconceivably older.

"Thought I'd come in and pass the time o' day," he jerked at me, and I shook hands with him and asked him if the summer'd done well by him. But he had

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no special thing to say and seemed, his cordial dues over, bent on getting off; in a moment more he was spinning away again down the drive.

"Cousin Thomas doesn't look very fit," I said to Mildred; but she seemed not to have noticed him.

"Shall we go down to the shore?" she asked me. "We always go about this time."

"Egerton?"

"Yes, and nurse."

Of course I'd go down to the shore, for a casual glimpse of my old friend the sea who had just inducted me into such strange rebelliousness. But Mildred, as she went with me, seemed relieved to change our meeting ground. My blood, too, had cooled. I didn't seem to myself any more a fellow demanding great things of life, but a fellow who didn't know how to use what he had.

XXVIII

My firm had sent for me to go on to New York, and had generously told me that what I had done had pleased them. More than that, they offered me another plum. Some disturbance was beginning in Eastern Europe. Did I want to run over there as special correspondent? I hesitated, and petitioned for delay. Then, as this admitted no tarrying, did I want to take a year's work at least in Africa? Might I think of it? Oh yes, for a fortnight. They wanted to assure me again that

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they valued my services deeply and would meet my wishes in every possible way.

I went back to Boston but not immediately to the Port. Instead, I walked into the empty house on Osborne Street, threw open windows and invited light and dust into its obscurity. I went to my study last, and when I had let the air in and waked it from sleep to what I felt was a welcoming response to me, I sat down by my desk to think out my life. Was I a blatant egotist because I was regarding my life as an entity, as a man might look upon the picture or book he had not yet finished, and that I felt it was important that it should be finished according to what might be the first design? Had I within me the seeds of that great desire which springs up in some form of the created thing? And how far could I cherish that? what could I draw from the big reservoir, to pay it back in my accomplished deed? I knew very well that I was a poor citizen. I was not active in municipal matters, nor was I always conversant of what the world was doing. It was true that I had just been told I had done brilliant work in England; but that was because something had waked me, I knew, perhaps England's inherited illustriousness, and I had really looked upon things well worth my reverence. But there is no doubt that, if I had a talent, even if I had none for verse, it was a talent for writing out the lives of individual men and women, a little talent, perhaps a serviceable one. That was the poor, tiny talent I was

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thinking about now, planning for its future, as I planned for my son. Neither of them might justify so much consideration, but I was fond of them. They seemed tremendously important to me. And as I should not sacrifice my son for my talent, I began to think I should not sacrifice my talent for my son: that is, if it meant buying more expensive meats for him than a son of mine had any right to eat, when he should come to the carnivorous stage. I was sick of the whole show, as Johnnie McCann was wont to say when he abandoned his grip on the life line the Powers hold out to us. I didn't like the system of things. It seemed to me now, as to Blake, a mean age given up to ways of living conveniently, a time of little things. There was no place for a man who sat down to write what was honestly in him without reference to that banal huckster, the selling list: unless indeed his bread was bought for him beforehand. What I had told Ellen Tracy was true: I had got my popularity and my prices because I was a muddleheaded sentimentalist. I "had it come out well." The doctor who came home from clinic after letting blood, could read one of my stories and go off into his well-earned sleep with a fatuous credulity that perhaps the world was doing very decently after all. And it wasn't that I didn't believe the world was doing excellently. I believed it was, in the large. I believed there was God, and that He knew what He was about. But I saw the immediate struggle was grim and awful, and I wanted to be able to paint it so, if I minded,

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without being told realism in my form wasn't "magazinable. Hadn't I some more of my purely idealistic sketches?" And if it hadn't been for that carnival of cookery in the kitchen and roses all over the house and the general embroidery of life, I should have replied, No, I hadn't an idealistic page, and the page I had written was exactly what I meant to write at that moment. Wasn't there some limbo, my hot soul inquired of itself, where a man might write out what was in him and patiently put it in a book to be read or not read, as destiny decides? I was dotty that night, as Johnnie again would say. I thought of the great immortalities straining to be born, and nobody striving to snatch them out of their matrix: the poem waiting in the stillnesses, the pictures painted invisible for us to call them out when we had purified our sight. And how could we purify it? Why, by ceasing to eat fat dinners and to pursue the blatant littlenesses of the day. And there at my study table I went mad all over again, as I had on board ship, and resolved that I, at least, would get out of the *mêlée* and that my wife and son should go with me. Exalted because I had resolved it and Mildred was not there to say me nay, I took up the little gray volume of Blake's drama, and read it through. Ah, here was work. This was written as the man's integrity would have it, and with the full authoritative sound of one who knew the genesis of verse. He could tell you what other hands had struck the chords to such measures, as a composer takes a

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foregoing masterpiece and improvises, though his own theme is still his own. I wondered if the world knew just how important this business of the poet is. Here they were in their market-place, everybody buying and selling, the strident clamor of it drowning out the small, low pipe of the man who can only sing. The poet couldn't invent appliances to make the wheels go faster. He could only make verse, and it seemed to me that when it was verse like Blake's there'd better be silence to hear it. There'd better be long hours, not at the fag end of the maltreated day when nobody wanted anything but a literary anodyne, but hours when the best within us came to the poet and besought his page to sing. And then I bethought me suddenly of my novel: it was because I had thought first of Ellen Tracy. I often had these unsummoned fancies about her, as if she came into the room. I pulled the novel out of the little wooden chest I had bought for it before I went away, and where it had stayed locked as in a chamber of its own. I looked at it with an uncomprehending eye. Was it good stuff? I couldn't tell. It was certainly "queer," if to be queer is not to fit any of the recognized rules. So I put it away again, and knew suddenly I wanted to talk with Blake. I telephoned the *Thief* and found he had just gone out. So I left a message for him that if he came in he was to dine with me at a place we knew. Otherwise I begged he'd come round in the evening, or I'd go to him, anywhere he said.

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About eight o'clock he came, and I ran down to open the door to him. There he was, the tall, distinguished figure beginning to stoop a little now, not because he was yet even in the prime of life, but because he carried a complexity of burdens. He was thinner in the face, too; lines had graven themselves there, the indubitable witnesses of disappointment and sad revery. The look of the happy bridegroom he had worn when he went off in his new clothes to woo Ellen Tracy had settled into a subdued acquiescence. It was patent that Ellen Tracy would have none of him. He had accepted his defeat. Henceforth the world was not for him; but I could well believe those eyes would light up their cavernous solitudes if you talked to him about poetry. And this I at once began to do, eagerly, for I was anhungered to have him, from his land of verse attained, blow for me the horn of old desire. We had gone at once up to my study, and I, having conjured up some ice, set before him a big pitcher of the only drink his temperance craved. For a moment after he sat down he seemed to forget me; but he recalled himself, glanced about him, and apparently approved the dignified quiet of the room.

"This is good," he said. "You do your work here?"

"Yes," I told him, feeling exceedingly shamefaced over it when I remembered his only solitude was the chaos of his tawdry lodging-house. I was cut off from the noises below, if there ever were any, I added, by the double door. My wife had so arranged it.

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"Ah," said he, reflectively. "You're a fortunate fellow, Redfield."

I owned dutifully that I was, though at that moment I was inwardly seething in discontent.

"I shall never attain any kind of comfort, any decent solitude," he said. Then he voiced my answering thought, continuing, "I earn enough, but I don't know how to spend it. I couldn't plan a thing like this. Ah, well!"

Mary had told me once that he had in the country antipathetic relations to whom he was patiently faithful. Most of his money went to them. How had he thought he could take home to his lodging-house a bird of paradise like Ellen Tracy? But in the dawn of a wild hope everything lies in light.

"You know how to get along with the earth," he said, "with things as they are. You've succeeded."

There was no bitterness in this. He wasn't laying to his soul the unction that, because he hadn't thriven, he was the better man. He knew as well as I that in these days of bruiting of values not only does the little man creep into place but the great man does sometimes get his hire. My mind, as he spoke, rapidly ran over the inventory of what I had. I lived softly, I accepted an acquaintance with the world which also lived softly. I might lie under, if I would, that most insidious mould and canker, the sense of privilege. Yet I was eaten up and spurred and lashed by a discontent such as I had never imagined. I felt I had missed the way.

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"I couldn't do it," said Blake. "I don't know how. I couldn't marry. She'd only have been miserable. It's just as well."

His head sank forward on his breast in the acquiescence of age, and his sad eyes went dreaming on in anticipation of the years without her. I understood what was within him: the perfectly well knowing mind that told him he could not play the game as lesser men of us played it, and yet the heart that ached for her. But he knew and I knew that if Ellen Tracy had loved him he would not have needed to play the game of place and privilege. She was so understanding in fine, still ways that she would have created for him a paradise of his own. That was what made the loss of her a sharp regret.

"Blake," I said, "I want to talk about poetry."

He woke at once.

"Been writing?" he asked.

No, I hadn't been writing. I'd been earning food. This last I didn't tell him.

"But it seems to me," I said, "I've got to do something or die. I've gone the wrong road."

He was looking at me with interest.

"So," said he, "you feel it, too."

Had he felt it for me? My mouth was dry as I realized how near I had come to losing him, how I might have him yet, the friendly judgment, the community of equal hopes. Had he seen me earning money out of my infernal botches and thought that

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was my high water mark of the things I judged it righteous to do? At least he should know what things I saw to be most excellent.

"I'm not like you," I said stupidly. "Certain things aren't important to me. First editions aren't. But poetry is, Blake, poetry is. And, by God, I believe I might have had it."

He was broad awake to me.

"Your Epithalamium is immortal," he said. "It's already immortal. Nobody can shake it."

"I don't care for that," I told him.

He opened his eyes at me.

"You don't care for it, man? Then you're an ass."

But I couldn't follow that road. It wasn't a poem to me. It was a vision of my woman-worship, and the world had been invited to look at my vision and I had been given money for it.

"I can't tell you what I mean," I said. "But I wish I had lived simply and given myself a chance to put down the things that came to me. They came at first; and then, I suppose because I was too busy earning money, they stopped coming."

"It is queer," he said meditatively, as if struck anew by the justice of the gods. "The old saws are true. It does seem as if you couldn't have both things. You can't have the earth and immortal life."

To hear his confirmation made me wilder than ever in my ecstasy.

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"I've got to be free, Blake," I said, "free to see what's in me."

"But you can't be free," he said, looking at me with a shrewd practicality that came curiously from him. "You couldn't leave this." He glanced now about the room comprehensively, as if it indicated the house. "All this means a pile of money. You couldn't reduce your scale."

"Why couldn't I?" I retorted. "Try me."

He nodded. He was thoughtful.

"Yes, you could," he said, "if you were both agreed. But you'd have to be of the same mind."

At that moment, even in the face of Mildred's refusal to go my way, I felt, if I could ask her once more, she would go with me joyously, "singing along the road." As I conceived it there in Blake's company, I felt capable of eloquence even, of the winged words that should lead her also into the land of my heart's desire. For that it was not her heart's desire I did not think. It was so goodly a land, so rich in sacred promises, I believed she had only to see the arras of leaves waving on its hills, the gleaming of its streams, and she would choose to go.

"Mildred may be alone next year, anyway," I explained. "I'm going back to consult her. It'll really be as she says."

Then I told him about my offer to go as special correspondent, and he listened gravely and nodded in assent from time to time. And I told him rather shyly, as if

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I had been much younger than he — and indeed I was very young compared with his inheritance of that land I longed to enter — I told him how my tiny voyage had waked me, the seeing a new people and a foreign land. It had stirred thoughts and feelings in me, and they had beaten themselves out into lines of verse, and I felt more voyaging, more hand-to-hand acquaintance with the earth might prove me further.

"Yes, go," he said, as if I were a lad and he my mentor. "It'll make a man of you."

I smiled rather grimly; but I was not offended. So I was not a man yet, he thought, though my first years had gone. Well, he was right. I was not. I had taken life as it came to me, and had, in a mild-tempered certainty that it knew more than I, given what it expected of me. If I had wanted my life to be of one complexion or another, I should have decided, in my own proper person, what it was to be. I fancied I began to see how the stupendous freedom of it swept over us like winds and nourished us like rain and ripened us like the sun. We were free to choose, and the One that made the vastness of it, though He was in the intimate atoms, yet sat outside to let us choose.

"I'm afraid," said I, haltingly to Blake, "I'm a good deal at the mercy of things."

He nodded. He understood perfectly without many words.

"Yes," he said. "I've been there. We all are,

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more or less. But when we begin to understand how things go, we're at their mercy less and less."

"Do you think," I was speaking to him even implor-ingly, as we interrogate our wise elders when we are in distressful doubt, "do you think we can govern — life?"

He had come broad awake out of the sleep of his genius which commonly kept him lulled to mortal things. He was smiling at me, a wonderful smile. How could Ellen Tracy have resisted him?

"Don't you know what it is you have to learn?" he asked. "It's the freedom of the will. Learn that, and you're just as light as if you were sailing the blue air."

I thought of the ranks behind ranks of creatures that expected me to do things. Mildred expected me to earn money and to go to church. It was right for me to earn money to keep my roof-tree from leaking and my hearthstone from stains, but not money enough to bring down snow from Everest and fruits from Cathay and jewels from the mine. And it was right for me to go to church, if I found it good for my soul and believed my Master God would be pleased by prostrations or even intellectual essays; but not be-cause other men went in frock coats and top hats and might buy my books the sooner if they passed the plate to me. Then there were the ranks of people who wanted me to write soporific tales, to make them think it a good old world and they needn't concern themselves so very much about it, with the humor that titillates

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and none of the big ironies that might make them suspect they possibly were illumined by its play. And there were the editors who wanted me to be "magazinable," and my publishers who had fatally discovered just what the public wanted of me and were prepared to serve that very dish and no other. I fancy I spoke rather querulously, piteously, even, to Blake, he looked so detached, so capable, for that reason at least, of keeping his own will free.

"That sounds awfully well, but it isn't so. Things push and push. You might as well tell me a man that works twelve hours a day can go out into the country and look at the lilacs. He can; but if he loses his job, he starves."

"That's it," said Blake. "He starves."

His eyes were bright with the consciousness of illimitable reaches. He had seen them, the gallant walks of paradise, the gardens of the soul. And his lips were set as if, like the lips of a statue, they were carved for furthest time.

"But," I cried, in my futile chase of him across these plains of light where he seemed to see his way perfectly and I was all a-dazzle, "his wife and children starve."

"Oh, yes," said Blake, unmoved, save that his eyes seemed to be seeing farther still, "that's of course."

"Well," said I, "that can't be. Do you think that can be? He's pledged himself, hasn't he? He's given hostages to fortune."

"It's the freedom of the will," he repeated, as if

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from some haunting ecstasy, "the freedom of the will."

I got up and lighted a cigar. I believe I swore a little. If it was this to be a poet, I couldn't follow him. Did he mean to tell me I wasn't pledged to my son with every fibre of the being that had called him forth? My son was dear to me, dear as were the ruddy drops of my heart that lost a beat or two if he fell and bumped his little nose. But suppose he had not been — for I thought I had seen fathers who regarded their offspring incidentally — should I not have been as indissolubly pledged? I thought so. And Mildred, too, was pledged to him. We seemed to me, at that point of our married life, vowed, not so much to each other as to him. But Blake had done thinking of the freedom of the will, as he might have done writing a poem, and come out from the maze of it.

"Have you seen Mary?" he asked.

"No," I reminded him. "I've just come home, you know."

"She's overworked," said Blake. He had taken on a look of very human worry. "She has worked too hard, too long, spent herself for everybody."

"I wish she could have gone to Miss Tracy," I ventured.

"Well, why couldn't she?" said Blake, irritably. "Mary was simply perverse there."

I couldn't say to him, Mary didn't go to Miss Tracy because you were in love with Miss Tracy. I thought

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him exceedingly stupid not to have seen that. I thought I should have read a woman's heart better than that. But had I? Had I read Ellen Tracy's? I was to learn something about that in time to come.

Blake was looking at me in an engaging candor.

"Redfield," said he, "I wish there was some way for me to take care of Mary."

"There isn't," said I, and then played my best card, "except one."

I didn't know whether he heard me or not. He was glooming on about Mary.

"She hasn't a cent ahead. I believe she's sending clothes now to Haley's brat. Haley's lost his job."

I ventured a stroke I thought portentously clever.

"She won't marry Haley, will she?" But it had no adequate effect.

"I don't know," said Blake. He drained his tumbler at a gulp and rose to go. The other mood had come upon him, the vision of flower-sprent fields and freedom of the will to roam in them, but lacking the slightest capacity for telling you how you were to roam without being a criminal or a lout. That was why he was a poet. But my mind stretched itself, and took in a deep breath and permitted itself to wonder whether the poets that were coming—the unborn who are to lighten our dark in springs to be—whether they won't see the earth as it is and the heavens as they are, and out of the completed vision of the two, give us a more infallible note to get the pitch of. And they are going to be

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even greater poets than Blake who jumped the issue he didn't find himself able to explain.

On the doorstep he looked up at the stars for a moment, again forgetting me. I made no doubt he was going home to write big things. But I dared to drag him back into the earthly coil.

"Blake," said I, and wondered how I dared, "I wish you'd take care of Mary."

Then I shut the door between us. I went in to smoke and meditate. You couldn't smoke with much comfort before Blake, knowing he thought it an uncleanly fashion. I was not sure but I did, myself, but it helped me through. I sat there in my bedroom, thinking, thinking on into the night. I could not unravel the coil of liberty, the liberty of the free creature to fulfil his most righteous impulses without sacrificing to the gods of time and change. And neither, I believed, could Blake. For though he told me his will was free, I perceived that it wasn't free to let him leave the *Thief:* for if he had left it, not only would he have starved, which was immaterial to him, but so would those dismal relations in the country. I was sorry I hadn't taunted him gently with his sacrifice to the *Thief:* yet I knew what he would have said. He would have evaded the direct issue, and without knowing he shirked it, for he didn't even see it. He would have looked over the valley of this world to the height of his idealisms beyond. This was what it must be to be a poet, and seeing this world as I did, I wondered if I could

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ever be a poet at all. But before I slept I had written a sonnet, slapdash, with a free hand, because it clamored to be done. It was about a woman, her hair streaming behind her on the wings of her going, so fast she ran. She was running into the future to keep there a beautiful tryst, and the hair was the hair of Ellen Tracy.

XXIX

I DIDN'T go back to the Port until the afternoon, for I wanted to see Mary, and went round to her office to take her to lunch. I found her presiding over three young acolytes at the typewriter, herself working a wondrous machine that ground out the notes a puissant broker had been speaking into it. This was a different Mary from the one I had left; she was haggard, worried about the eyes like a creature that has run too hard, chased by some dog of evil chance. She gave the acolytes a reprieve, and put on her hat at once to go with me. Mary's shabby clothes! I wasn't in the habit of noticing women's gowns, though I did know Mildred's were exquisite. I had learned it through several varieties of argument, the two prime ones being that her fabrics were delicate as smoke or young untarnished leaves, and that they cost so much. This last was actual demonstration. Ellen Tracy's clothes seemed to me like the most beautiful plumage. I can't explain it; they simply did. But Mary, my dear Mary wore a hat that even

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to me looked battered, and though her soldierly uniform of shirt waist and skirt was put on with its old exactness, even I could see that it would scarce pass muster.

"Where shall we go?" I asked her. Would she come to the club?

No, she was quite firm about that. She knew a fish grill not far away where we could get the freshest lobster. I rather insisted on the club because it would be quiet; but Mary shrank from it and upheld her grill, and to that we went. It was a quaint, good little place that did itself no perjury in advertising everything as strictly fresh. You went through the fish shop itself where crustaceans and fins lay on immaculate slabs ever being sluiced, and so to a shaded room on an alley where you might sit by a window looking on a wall and find your brow cooled by the zephyr from electric fans. Mary was so tired that she took off her hat at once and hung it up, in a business-like way, and I ordered the luncheon, a procession of all the fish I could compass, with ginger ale, the only bottled goods provided. After that, I looked across at Mary and found her smiling at me, her dear, well-wishing smile, as if she liked me very much.

"Mary," said I, "you won't marry Haley, will you?"

She broke out laughing.

"My sakes!" said Mary. "Who told you I wanted to marry him?"

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"Not wanted to," I amended. "That's the trouble with you. You don't want to marry anybody. Everybody wants to marry you. But don't you marry Haley. You promise me."

She was still laughing, quite light-heartedly indeed, and with so total a lack of embarrassment that, if Haley had been there, even he would have seen his chances dwindle.

"What in the world put that into your head?" she challenged me.

I was a blundering ass.

"Blake was in to see me last night," I said. "We agreed you'd do anything to help a fellow out, and we were afraid you'd marry Haley. On account of the kid, you know."

I saw what I had done. The laugh went out of her eyes. Hurt pride came into them.

"Mr. Blake has no business to talk me over," she said.

And then the clam broth came, and I could only weakly and contritely murmur over mine: —

"O Mary, it isn't as you think. I believe I said it, anyway. Blake said the finest things of you, stunning things. He'd lay down his life for you."

"He needn't," said Mary, frigidly. "I don't want any lives laid down." But her cheeks were burning.

"I came home on the steamer with Miss Tracy," I told her, and she looked at me in a quick new pain of interest.

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"Then she's come," said she, and I said, without much consideration of the wisdom of it, but hurt in my turn for Ellen Tracy: —

"You don't like her."

"I do," said Mary. "I adore her."

"Then why do you speak of her so grudgingly? Why won't you go and live with her?"

Mary had no small vanities, no reserves ready to defend her secrets.

"I speak of her as I do because I want her either to marry Mr. Blake or stay out of the country and not come back here torturing him. And I won't live with her because she won't marry him and I — can't bear to see her."

This last confession burst from her by its own force, and I believed it was an honest one. Mary herself didn't know she was tortured by Ellen Tracy not because Blake couldn't get her but because he wanted to.

"I don't believe you need pity him so very much," I said. "I don't call him broken-hearted."

"Does he talk about her?"

The question leaped at me.

"No," I owned, "but he does talk of poetry, and he looks as if he were thinking about the things that make him write."

"What things?" she asked, as if she were hungry to know all that might make her understand him better and lessen her pathetic distance from him.

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"Things outside this world," I told her. "Things Blake seems to know about and nobody else, just at present."

"Did she talk of him?" she asked, "Miss Tracy?"

"She spoke of him. She's devoted to his poetry."

"But not to him," she insisted.

"No, Mary," I owned, "not in the way you mean."

"Then you think she isn't in love with him the least little mite and he'll get her by and by?"

"No," I said. "I know she's not in love with him."

"Women change," she persisted, and I answered: —

"Not Ellen Tracy."

"How do you know so much about her?" Mary countered shrewdly. "I should think she was in love with you."

Now she said it rather roughly, rather brusquely, and meaning not a whit of it, but it struck me full in the consciousness of what was and might not be, and I seemed to lose my breath and looked at her aghast. She was eating her lobster and took no note of me.

"No," she said then, in her own frank voice, "I suppose she never will care enough. But I'm tired — I'm tired of seeing him suffer."

Mother-weariness was in her voice, the world-old yearning of the creature who has brought life into the world and found it so niggardly a place that the creature must go bare. I tried to be wise, and if not that, gentle.

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"Mary," I said, "did you ever think he doesn't suffer as much as you or I, if we were cut off from what we loved?"

"No," she said shortly. "Of course he suffers. He suffers more."

"No," I said. "We've just our aching hearts, and he's got besides something that's like a musical instrument. It's his art of making verse. Don't you know if you could fiddle, when you were tired or forsaken you'd put your fiddle under your chin and play and play, and maybe go to sleep playing? That would be the only way you could go to sleep at all."

"Yes," said Mary, dreamily. "I've often thought if I had a piano —" she roused herself. "But don't you suppose he thinks of her all the time?"

"Maybe," I said, "but I'm sure he thinks of his poetry all the time. The poetry's the treble. She — his loss, his despair, whatever he calls it in his mind — that's the bass. It comes tum-tumming in when the treble needs it."

"I see," said Mary, rather injured, "you don't think he's got much depth of feeling."

"God forgive me if I said a thing like that," I told her. "I only mean she may be the most beautiful thing on earth to him, and yet she's a thing outside himself. His poetry isn't a thing outside himself. It *is* Blake. I saw it making in his eyes last night. He's a dear fellow, Mary. He thinks you work too hard."

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Suddenly she looked shy and softened. I might have brought her a gift from the Fortunate Isles, his kindness seemed so dear.

"I guess I have to," she said simply. "I haven't laid by anything, you see. I've got to now." And then suddenly chary of this personal trend, because we had perhaps been too frank, we talked of England and I told her I might go to Africa. I began to find that the more precious as I saw Mary's marvel over it. Africa seemed to hold in her eyes the place it had in her geography days.

"Well," she said, "what chances you men do have. I don't know what aunt Cely would say."

Aunt Cely, it seemed, was living in the country, guardian of Mr. Haley's incubus. And at that news I dared again, as I was leaving Mary at her office door, and adjured her, "Don't you go down there, Mary, or you'll find the kid bawling and getting crumbs on the floor, and you'll marry Haley."

And Mary laughed this time and, as we shook hands heartily, told me I was a good boy.

"There's nobody just like you," she said in her heartening way. "You're a good boy."

Nobody just like me! Well, considering the blunders I had made, and the paradises I had managed not to enter, I hoped not.

I went down to the Port that afternoon, and I arrived there at a moment when the glory and freshness of the summer seemed to be resurrected, under an added

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robe of grace. I shall never forget that day, the outward loveliness of it like a symbol of more than transient beauty, the assuaging softness in the air, the indescribable promise far more solemn than the promises of sleep. This was the laying of the earth to rest for an awakening. I felt singularly young, fit from my sea voyage, the tan of it not yet off my face, and my blood bounding to the tune of something to happen. There was going to be a new heaven and a new earth for me, my spirit told me. I was going to reach for and attain the freedom of the will: for though I thought tenderly and lightly of Blake's evading the issue of the will and life, I knew he had got hold of things by the right handle. I took a carriage up from the station, and found the house sleeping, like the world. My son, I knew, would be on the beach at this time, and Mildred might be with him. But she was not with him. She was at her desk in the large, cool living room, closing envelopes with a swift motion. A little pile of them was at her side: bills, I thought, for her check-book lay at hand. When my step invaded the stillness, she looked up quickly, almost had to recall herself, and I had time to see how tired her face had grown. What hard battle had she fought, what had there been so exacting in being wife of mine? But she smiled at once and her forehead smoothed itself. She came to me, less in haste than obedience, and, moved by the pallor of her forehead, where should have sat happiness, a woman's crown, I took her in

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my arms and kissed her fervently. Then I pulled out a big chair and bade her rest in it, and myself straddled her own chair at the desk. I was in haste now to tell my news. I wonder if every man child is in as hot a mood to run with his tidings to the maternal heart that waits him. I have always been a creature homing to the woman spirit to tell her what I had brought: first to my mother, then to Mildred, and, with my novel, to Ellen Tracy.

"I've got a big chance," I told her now.

She was unfeignedly in haste to hear. Africa, I added, for six months at least.

"How much do they offer?"

This was her instant query. I told her. I felt a little drop in temperature, though I hardly knew why. Perhaps I expected first an outcry, — "Africa for six months!" But her geographical instinct was not so primitive as Mary's, and perhaps Africa seemed to her less of a divagation. She was considering.

"They won't give you more?" she said.

I couldn't ask more, I told her. It was generous, it was sufficient. I wasn't really worth more. I should be, I hoped, when I came back, but now I was mighty proud and pleased to get that much.

"When do you sail?" she asked, with the instancy of the wife ready to buckle on her husband's sword.

I felt another drop, but I tried to speak chaffingly, still my old habit with her when I saw no thoroughfare.

"Well, am I going at all? That's the question."

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"Haven't you told them?"

"I told them I'd got to ask my wife."

That was gallant and tender. I looked to see the answering glow. But she was still considering.

"You can't do better," she said, lifting serious eyes to mine. "You can't do better, I should say, now can you?"

"No," I said, feeling curiously mortified, as a person who had assumed great things as his deserts, "no, I can't in all probability do better."

We might have been two business partners talking out the conditions of a deal. But after all, I summoned my common sense to remember, marriage is a business partnership of a sort. Her face cleared and brightened as that of one who has reached a fair conclusion.

"Then," said she, "you'll go."

"Yes," said I, with a dull ache in the region of my breathing apparatus, "I'll go."

But I called upon my heart not to be a ninny, though I did permit myself the reflection, "It seems an awfully long time. The boy'll have grown into knickers."

"Oh, no, he won't," said Mildred, practically, and again I was unreasonably dashed at her having the sense I lacked. I found I had wanted to go to enlarge my horizon, to look on men and things; but I had depended on leaving an ache behind me. It was ridiculous, and I would buck up and be a man, and as practical as she.

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"Now," said I, "let's talk things over. What I'd like is this. I'd like to give up the Osborne Street house and you and the boy go into a flat — not a little one, a good one with conveniences and a view — and when I come back we could either go on with the flat or do something else. Time enough to decide that then."

I ended rather weakly, for she had raised her eyebrows until her eyes looked large and portentous, almost the eyes of rage. But she was not enraged. She was only looking full at me with the measure of her wonder.

"Give up the Osborne Street house?" she repeated. "Why, I shouldn't think of it for a moment."

The difference that was a skirmish the other day had got to be fought all over again, as a battle, this time.

"I've been talking to Blake," I began, my mind running back to that errant interchange as something that would teach her what I meant if she could only see my mind as Blake did.

"About Osborne Street?" she inquired, with the smallest tinge of satire in her tone.

"He agrees with me that the thing for me to do is to live a simpler life," I floundered. "And do better work," I ended, in a banal simplicity.

"Where does Mr. Blake himself live?" she asked, with rather an elaborate appearance of interest. I told her miserably, knowing the weight of the argument was on the wrong side for me.

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"I fancied so," she said, a delicate conclusiveness in her tone, "or that it was a street of that sort. I don't believe Mr. Blake is the person to weigh the advantages of living in Osborne Street."

"Mr. Blake," I cried out irritably, "is a great poet."

"Well," said she, "do you propose being a poet?"

I couldn't answer. You could hardly say, at my age, "I propose now being a poet. Go to. I will sit down and be one." Could I tell her that I felt within me the stirring of indeterminate impulses, futile, shamefaced so far as their intrinsic outcome went, yet as real as the answering fibre in the young bird's wings when his elders push him out of the nest?

"I had an idea Blake rather believed in me," I hedged. "If he thinks I can do it, I can. That's the way I believe in him."

"Is it his belief," she asked, "that poetry can't be written in Osborne Street?"

I had no idea she could speak so incisively. I had a moment of miserable admiration.

"That's not it," I said clumsily. "It's only that if you insist on living on Osborne Street with no more income than we've got, you have to hustle to the exclusion of poetry. It isn't that I work too hard, Mildred. It's that I'm worried about money all the time, and I keep muddling over how to get a dollar, and it debases my mind like the mischief. I suppose if I were a big chap, a full-fledged poet with wings like iron, I shouldn't be muddled. I should get out

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of bed with a sonnet ready to serve up for breakfast and I could turn out a lyric as I walked down town. But I'm likely not a big man. I see no signs of it. Only I want to be as big as I can."

She seemed to be thinking, her eyes on the gray wall in front of her, which might have been illimitable space for all she saw of it. I had got used to that look. It meant that Mildred was brooding over the fortunes of the house of Redfield, and weaving to better them.

"Very well, then," said she. There was ultimate conclusion in her voice. "This is what I'll agree to do. I'll stay in Osborne Street until you come home, and then we can talk again."

That is, we were exactly where we had been when I put my plea.

"You can make me," she continued, "the same allowance you would make for a flat."

"But you can't live in Osborne Street for any less than we're spending now," I argued, feeling myself a brute to have it to say, "and spending less is exactly what I want to do. I want to retrench."

"I can live in Osborne Street for less than we are spending now," she insisted. "Or perhaps" — she seemed to throw this in not as believing it but, it truly seemed, to hurt me — "perhaps you didn't propose making me any allowance at all."

"Don't," I begged her. "Don't, dear. I don't say you haven't done awfully well. You're a tip-top

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manager." I took up her check-book as I spoke, and turned to her balance. She came out of her seat with a lithe motion and was upon me, not with a a spring but a delicate furtiveness I didn't like.

"Here!" she said breathlessly. "Give it to me. It's mine."

But I had seen, and I did not give it to her. It was not the book of the bank where I had left her account and where I was making regular deposits for her. It was another bank of high standing, and her balance was incredible. I had never had so much money together in my life, and here was the witness of it, staring up at me, and the last check drawn was to the name of her dressmakers. All this time she stood staring at me and I stared at her. She had no breath. She looked like a woman horribly afraid. Her hand was on one corner of the check-book, but my hand held the book, though lightly. She might have snatched it if she had had the bad manners, but I knew she wouldn't for another reason. She was afraid. I had no whim of tormenting her, but I drew the book gently from her touch and put it in my pocket. We could talk more candidly, I thought, when the actual record was not between us. For after all, the book was not the issue. It was abstract values we were to meet upon, as high as heaven, as unseen also.

"Sit down," I said to her.

She retreated to her chair, and there she sat, upright and rigid. It was I who was trembling. My hand

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shook. I felt the nausea of nervous overthrow, and I realized I was in the rage where men slay, if not their enemy, then something in themselves. I don't like to return to that moment of finding myself outside my accustomed frame of mind, of obediences to the world as men have judged it right to make it. Whether I had returned to the brute I cannot say, whether my higher faculties were suspended. I only know I was another man and a most miserable one, my heart throbbing until it seemed to run away with my life, my nerves in revolt, my head whirling. All the accustomed channels of life seemed to have run dry. The sun was shining, but it shone with no answering recognition from my dull eyes. My bread and water I knew would henceforth be the food of my physical frame. There would be no answering pæan within me: "Bless God for bread. Bless Him for water and the sun." Yes, something had been knocked senseless in my brain. The higher faculties were benumbed and the natural man was having his brutish way. Yet I was thinking fast. I saw what was, in the brilliant light of certainty. All this time, while I seemed to be accommodating myself to the new, dreadful world where I found myself, I must have been looking at her and without a word. For she seemed to wither and grow old, though she still kept her upright pose in the chair, and out of this miserable mask that had been her spring-tide face, came a dead voice: —

"Do you accuse me?" The voice fell, and then

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flew out in anger, a sharp, despairing anger, like an animal that springs. "It's your own fault. You forced me to it."

The words sickened me anew. I had to speak. I couldn't have her babbling on in horrible accepted terms. I felt myself shuddering all over. It might well have been, for my physical overthrow, as if I were the one to be accused.

"Don't, don't," I said. "Don't speak."

If she would not incriminate herself for a moment, I might pull myself together and think what to say. And then, when heart and flesh seemed failing me, a hand came to me out of the living past. I thought of Egerton Sims. What would a courtly gentleman like Egerton Sims have done when he found his wife clothing herself out of the substance of another man, with a background she and the other man alone knew?

"Mildred," I said. I called her name again.

At the sound of my voice, raucous in my ears, gentle as I tried to make it, she plucked up courage. Perhaps, seeing me so undone, she found the balance of strength on her side and foresaw my overthrow.

"Give it back to me," she said, and I laughed, for that made it seem again as if the book were the issue between us. "What business have you to keep it?"

"I shall keep it," I said. "You can get another. But I've got to hold this for reference."

She rose to her feet, and I rose with her. Rage came upon me again, and I crossed the distance be-

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tween us at a stride and took her wrists in my hands, those slender wrists with the azure veining I had so often kissed. There we stood manacled together by the law and by my rage, and she was trembling.

"When did he give it to you?" I asked.

She was silent.

"The date in the book is June," I told her. "June fifteenth. Was it then?"

She bent her head in affirmation.

"June fifteenth," I said, "two weeks after I had sailed." And yet was it June fifteenth after all? for, why should I believe it? and after all, what difference did it make when he had endowed her? "You must give it back to him," I said.

She did not answer, but I saw immovable resolution in her face. She would not give it back, let me plead how I might.

"The car was yours, too, I suppose," I said. Things were pretty bad with me if I could sneer at her. "The car and the chauffeur, and the chauffeur's food. And it looked as if it were your cousin's car, and he had lent it to you, to you and aunt Rule. But it was yours. That was understood between you. Only aunt Rule wasn't to know, she and the poor clown of a husband coming home with the beggarly sum he had earned for you."

While I let my rage run itself out in this vaporing, I was perfectly conscious that Egerton Sims would not have met a blow like this in this wild way. He

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was there, a grand figure in the vaporings of my mind, but I could not get him clearly.

"Sit down there," I said to Mildred. "Sit down at the desk."

She obeyed me, chiefly glad, I think, to get rid of my touch upon her wrists. I took out the check-book and laid it before her.

"Make out a check," I said, "for the entire amount."

She sat dumb as a statue, looking at the bright red cover of the book.

"Open it," I said. "Make out the check."

She did open the book, and, with a lifeless hand, wrote the number and the date; it was a straggling scrawl. She was afraid, I knew, and I was merciless in my acceptance of her fear. It was a weapon on my side. She filled in the figures carefully, exactly as I had told her. It was the entire sum. Then she looked up at me.

"What name?" she asked.

"My name," I said. "His name isn't to be spoken between us. Make it out to me and I will take it to him personally."

She laid down the pen.

"You won't?" I said. "You won't?"

She made no answer. I felt as if she had decided not to speak to me again at all. I will not tell what murderous impulse came over me. It was not murderous against her, but against the world, everything that lay outside me to torture me. I felt blind hate.

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Again I told her to do it, and again, while she sat still, her eyes fixed even meekly on the desk, I besieged her with questions whether she meant that she actually would not do as I had bidden her.

"Then," I said, "if you won't, if you're going to eat the bread of one man and let another man clothe you, by God, I'll leave you."

And at that instant I heard a little crinkling sound on the gravel of the drive. It was young Egerton coming home from the shore with his nurse, and the sound was that of his little cart. Did the sight of him soften my mind toward the woman who had brought him into the world? Not for an instant. He made another weapon of hate.

"And," I said to her, "I'll take my son with me."

I turned from her swiftly because she was a part of the world I hated, and I got out of the house before my son could reach me, though he bellowed, seeing me, until the nurse was fain to hurry. But I would not meet him. I took the other turn of the drive and I heard his voice, aggrieved, following after me, and the nurse as she tried to comfort him. At the gate I met the car, Mildred's car. The chauffeur had stopped it at sight of me, and now he asked me civilly if I had ordered it. I looked at him for a blank minute. He seemed a part of the world in conspiracy against me.

No, I said, we shouldn't need it this afternoon. We were going away. Would he find Mr. Gorham and tell him we shouldn't need it again, and that I

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would see Mr. Gorham personally, in a day or two, and settle with him.

Then I walked on, as fast as I could stride, for I knew now where I was going. I saw where this had pushed me, where all the years had led me, and at once I was deliriously light-hearted and light-headed in the measure of my former madness. For I was going to Ellen Tracy.

XXX

I WENT in town soberly enough, and bought a paper on the way, really to persuade my mind into following the accustomed grooves of life. I sat there reading about trivialities and disasters, and all the time something within me kept chanting, — "I am going to Ellen Tracy."

At the station I took a carriage to cross the city, and it was not until I was two-thirds of the way to Hopeful Sands, with the dusk now glooming, that fear struck upon me lest she should not be there at all. What could I do if she were not? I felt the sickness of that premonitory chill. I looked out of the car window as we fled, at little homesteads brooding down. I knew, none better, the life in those farm-houses at the supper hour, mother stewing things and making the cheer of warmth, and father coming in from the chores and bringing the twilight chill: for it was cool at dusk though the day had been like summer. These were

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the intimate sanctities of homely life. I knew the smell of supper-time, and saw the shining lamp. I was the little boy by the hearth, feeling his calloused toes where the ungracious earth had "stubbed" them. He had thrown away his shoes and stockings when the day turned out so warm and gone back to summer's "barefoot," and spite of what mother might say, he'd "stick it out" till bed. But after all, was I the boy? No, I was something happier and more free than "barefoot," for I had escaped and I was going to Ellen Tracy. In a preposterous daring I thought I might take my son to her to-morrow, and it looked sane and right. I made no doubt that, in her obedience to other-worldly values, she would receive him until I could provide for him afar from the strange woman who had given him birth.

When we stopped at Hopeful Sands it was dark, and I took a carriage and drove, under the rising moon, to her gate. There I dismissed the man. I would find my way unannounced by the sound of wheels. I went in haste through the driveway's winding length, a lamp here and there emphasizing the intervals of dark, and the bitter smell of leaves ripening pungent upon the air. The door was open, and no one in sight. For some reason that seemed to me a bright omen, and I walked through the hall to the terrace, and there she was, all in white, like an angel, and aunt Patten sitting near. Aunt Patten's presence was no more to me in a deterrent way than if she had been a creature of imper-

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vious senses, or sworn to be absolutely sympathetic with what I sought. I crossed the room and knelt beside Ellen Tracy and bent my head upon her arm. The one glance I had taken at her face showed it almost luminously white and the eyes wide and shining. Had she, through some hidden channel of sense, expected me, or would my sudden coming have been inevitably moving to her? And at that same instant I heard the soft swish of silk and light retreating footsteps; aunt Patten had left us to our talk. I think I had put my arms about Ellen Tracy, and she sat there as still as a woman of stone. Only things were not still in that beautiful kingdom of her body. I could hear her heart, and it ran a race with life. As for me, I had come home. That I knew. And now I spoke and what I think I said was this: —

"I have left her. I have come to you."

What I expected I do not know, but whatever I expected, my exaltation of soul told me it would be righteous. I was in that state when we seem to have escaped the earth to breathe a higher ether where, whether fallaciously or not, our hungers tell us there is liberty. If she had put her arms about me, I swear I should have taken it for an acceptance as heavenly as my mother's comforting: or perhaps an angel's. The angel doesn't debase you. She makes you stronger to go on. Only the dilemma is to know who the angels are; and I thought I knew. What Ellen Tracy did was to say in a perfectly steady voice: —

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"Get up," adding in a kind entreaty that asked forgiveness for too harsh a mandate, "Please!"

And I got up, not mortified from her repulse, but very anxious to obey, as we are when mother calls us. The maternal in her was speaking to the child in me. We are little children when we love very much, and I did love her. I think she knew she must mother me and command me, so natural was her wisdom, and unspoiled.

"Sit there," she said, and I sank into the chair aunt Patten had left vacant. Suddenly I felt tired and sad and forlorn indeed. I was even hungry. Then Ellen Tracy, as if she felt she had been hard enough on me, smiled, and clasped her hands about her knees and bent forward to me, and said: —

"We mustn't sentimentalize, you and I. We can't fall into that trap. And how is young Egerton?"

She seemed to be recalling me, in that tenderly laughing reminder, to the biggest tie of honor I had; and she was right. I knew that. But I wished I had some hand to lay hold of in my queer loneliness. The very little hand of Egerton might have been enough. I was not to lay hold of Ellen Tracy's hand. That I saw, and I smiled a little ruefully at her command of me.

"I think I'd better tell you about it," I said waveringly; and now I was light-headed.

"Better not," said she, brusquely. Then she broke down herself. "Oh," she said, "let me have that to remember. Let me remember you kept all the loyal-

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ties, all the commandments. You know what things we expect of men. They don't do them, not once a lifetime. Don't be weak. Be splendid!"

I tried to pull myself together. I was very far from being splendid, and the banner of it waved at me didn't seem to draw me on. It made me rather dizzy. I seemed to be groping, and I thought I saw realities that were the roots of life, not the gay bourgeoning that lies in being splendid. I felt she'd got to be convinced and I had one argument she was ignoring.

"But," I said quite practically, for there was no sense in subterfuges with a person like her, "you see I love you. That's why I came."

"Yes," said she, just as simply, "I know that. And I do you. But this is the last time we can ever say it."

I was immediately at peace, though there was no marvel of assuagement in her saying she loved me. I must have known it — always, I thought, in the challenge of eternity that goes with sudden love. I repeated the words: —

"You do love me, then?"

"Yes," she said. There were tears on her cheeks, and her eyes seemed to implore me to understand their sadness, since she would fain have hidden it away. "Of course I do. But till that day I met you in the street I didn't know you were married."

Well, she had been quicker to recognize me than I to give my allegiance to her its rightful name. Yet I had known it was allegiance. It was the same thing.

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"And when you gave me the novel to read," she said, as if she had wondered passionately whether this she could ever tell, and now it came pelting out, "I thought you'd seen it in me — seen I cared too much — and that was your kind way of telling me to be proud." Her mouth grieved now, as her eyes remembered hours and days hidden from me then and to be hidden now.

I was following back the path of her girlish shame.

"You thought that," I said.

And I could say no more because my ruth over her was so great. Now she wiped her eyes in a commonplace way and smiled at me.

"That's all," she said. "I suppose I wanted you to know that. I wanted you to know I thought you were as free as I — you looked so, somehow! — I had to have you know I wasn't so weak or bold in thinking you the best and bonniest ever."

I? What fantasy had invested me with such a lustre?

"But," she said, "you're not free. You're bound in every possible way, and this is the last time you and I are to speak so to each other."

Delight was in my soul.

"You can't prevent my loving you," I told her.

Any woman, it seemed to me, might have allowed herself a wave of joy at being loved so much. Not she. It had made her sad. She spoke almost as if to herself.

"I've often wondered what I should do if a thing like

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this happened — a thing that was so overwhelming it could even make itself seem right."

"It is right," I cried. "I have been mistaken. I have left her. I am free."

She shook her head, looking at me now.

"Do you think you can break your promises?" she said. "Why, you're not even free to talk to me like this. I am not free to talk to you."

And then a man came in with a tray and on it were sandwiches and coffee. The smell of the coffee was good to me, and I felt that I must be a weak chap indeed, for perhaps this was "feeling faint." She told the man to draw up a little table and place the tray there; and when he had left us, she poured a cup of coffee and put it into my hand. And while I drank it and ate she talked about aunt Patten, who, she said, always knew by instinct whether a guest had come in haste and dinnerless, and was always sending in trays. I thought it might not have been instinct but the sight of my face: for if it looked as I had felt, it must have been distraught indeed.

When I had set down my cup, with new strength in me, I turned to her. She was more than a beautiful woman. To my eyes there was an aura about her, the emanation of what I knew to be her love and truth. She was clad not only in her own beauty but in the mantle my eyes had lent her, and I forgot all other womanhood. Nobody seemed to have power to harm me any more, nor even to give me pain. All the steps

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of my life had been leading me here, to her gate and to her feet.

"Do you mean to tell me," I said in my accession of joy triumphant, "that I am not to tell you I love you?"

And immediately I saw I had given her pain. Her face that, a moment ago, had had a sadness of its own, quivered into a mute grief.

"Don't," she said.

I saw she had lost something she desired passionately to retain. Was it that she had placed me on an eminence, and I had stumbled from it? Well, it was better that she should know me as I was. What could either of us gain by my telling her sophisticated lies when I loved her and I believed, if I lived chastely for her sake, I had a right to tell her so? I would tell her what lay behind my flight to her.

"Mildred—" I began, but she stopped me with a passionate outcry.

"No! no! Keep her secrets. You must be true to her or I shall die."

I seemed to myself to be floundering round in the bog of her denial, trying to find the path to take me to her. Was it not right for me to insist a little?

"She doesn't love me," I said. "I don't believe she even loves the child. Isn't it right for me to take the child and go?"

She looked at me dumbly. I saw she was bent, in this fantasy of hers, to prove me a hero, bent on my deciding my destiny in the way a hero should.

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"I won't ask anything of you," I told her, "except just to let me love you. To see you sometimes. To know you remember this night, when you said — "

"We shan't forget." This leaped from her. It was said before she could quench the fire that kindled it. "There's no danger. We shan't either of us forget."

"No," I said in an answering glow.

And immediately I knew I wanted her head upon my breast. She was right. There was no middle ground for us. We must say good-by that night, or tread the poor, worn path of tawdry sentimentalizing and expedient, the love that lies, saying, "I am friendship," the passion that cloaks itself in subterfuge. The world, I began to see, was a desert of hungers. If the desert could be watered by the tears of our true repentance, would it bloom? I thought not. For tears, I remembered, were salt. But now Ellen Tracy turned from me and walked to the rail and looked out upon the night. She stood very still, as if she were listening, and I listened with her. The wind had changed and there was commotion out there at sea beyond the bar. The buoys were waking up. Even the river felt the trouble of the great water to which it was tributary, and I heard its slap-slap on the beach. Ellen Tracy turned and walked back to me. I wish I could tell what dear change had come upon her face, how young it was, how like a child's, how piteous in the hope that I would help her.

"I've got to tell you a lot of things," she said. She

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was faintly smiling at me, in that wistful way of one who beseeches tolerance for confession. "Sit down."

So I seated myself opposite her again, and we were near, so near that I could see the widened pupils of her eyes. And she surprised me first of all.

"I'm not a prig," said she. "I'm not trying to save my own soul."

"No," I said, "no. Your soul doesn't need any saving."

She shook her head impatiently.

"My soul is like other souls. It has its temptations. It knows how to deceive itself. But I am not going to be deceived." She looked at me in the anguish of a creature who is being drawn somewhere against its will. "If it would help you," she said most piteously, "I would leave the whole world and go with you."

Was this my gracious lady, this girl with the quivering face, begging me not to ask her to go because she longed so inconceivably to yield? I began to feel something of her terror lest I should beseech her, lest I should lose the lady I had loved and see eternally the quivering creature I had killed.

"Why," said she, still the girl, still youth and tenderness incarnate, "I would die for you." And again, "Do you think I am trying to save my own soul?"

"No," I said, moved beyond all but the power of reassuring speech, "no, child." But eager love got the better of me, and I cried, "And I'd die for you. Yes, I'd die eternally."

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"That's it," said Ellen Tracy, as if I had given her the very clew she wanted. "You think you would. And I think I would for you. We'd be blotted out gladly. But we can't. God won't let us."

At last she'd got hold of something to stand by her — God — and her face shone. "You see," she said, "I've heard so much of it, people trying to find some other way round, when there's no way but one — the straight, true way. I'm afraid I should die if you deceived yourself or if I let you do it."

She was speaking in all a child's simplicity. She looked at me with a child's unspoiled clarity of glance. I began to see that Ellen Tracy was somebody for me to take care of, to protect, even from what was surely her love for me. I tried to speak very calmly now.

"You're not willing I should tell you about it, what made me come to you?"

She looked doubtful, but she shook her head.

"Better not," she said. "Anybody —" I knew she meant Mildred — "anybody would be hurt if she knew her affairs were carried to another woman."

I felt a grim impulse to laugh. That sense of irony that Mildred was responsible for fostering in me came to the surface and bade me remember that Mildred might be perfectly willing to hear that Ellen Tracy was the arbiter of her fate, because Ellen Tracy was so "well placed."

"Then," I said, "there's nothing for me but to do my sum and get the answer as best I can."

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She hadn't been to district school, but she took me as quickly as Mary would have done, smiling at me a smile that seemed all tender gratitude.

"I'm not to see you often?" I put tentatively.

She shook her head.

"But you don't say," I emboldened myself to urge, "that I'm not to see you at all."

"We haven't met very often in the past," said Ellen Tracy, proudly, I thought, as if she couldn't be making trysts with a man who was in love with her. "We shan't do so any more in the future. You have your wife and son, and I am busy."

Strangely her brusqueness did not hurt me. It made me feel such loving ruth for her because she had to stab herself and me, that she seemed very little to me and most dear. My love for her was of the nature of the love I had for my little son. By that I suppose I mean it was compact of all loves, and the tender side blossomed at that instant.

"Ellen Tracy," I said — I always had to use her two names together. I had felt from the first as if I had a right to that — "do you remember those two times when you and I seemed to escape from our bodies and to meet in a garden?"

She nodded. She was looking at me as if fascinated — by fear. She had been afraid, I saw, that I would ask this.

"Could we" — I hesitated, for now I was more afraid of intensifying that look on her face than of

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anything else in the world — "could we meet in that garden?"

"No," she said violently, "no."

"Why not, Ellen Tracy?"

"Because it's unwholesome. And so it's wrong."

"Ah, but how can we help it?" I urged, swept outside my care for her again by the tide of my passion, "if we're not to meet in the flesh — if we could dream about each other and meet so —"

"No," she said again.

"You can't prevent my coming," I told her, "to the garden to find you."

"I can refuse to be there," she said. "I do refuse it."

"You were there on shipboard. You didn't refuse then."

"No. The temptation was too great. And I thought you didn't know."

"Know what?"

"Know— we were — lovers." She said it solemnly, and not a heart-beat of my own told me it was wrong for her to say it.

But it could never be said again. The very tone of it, the measureless solemnity, had told me that.

"But you knew it," I besought her.

"Yes," she said.

Then she seemed to shake off the spell of this ecstasy, and got up from her chair, went to a little desk and looked at a paper there. She came back holding it in her hand, and stood before me smiling. It was a time-

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table, and her smile seemed to beg forgiveness for bringing its decrees into our talk.

"Now," said she, "I find there is a train in town in forty minutes. I'll order the car."

I got on my feet and tried to meet her smile with as brave a one of my own.

"No," I said, "I don't want your car. Ellen Tracy, is this the end?"

She looked at me, and I thought she was entreating me to comprehend the things she would not say. I thought I had got somewhere at last; but she must help me.

"There couldn't have been the garden," I said, "unless there were other places — other worlds — other lives —"

"So I think," she said. "I know it."

"Then," I said, a feeling on me such as the Norseman might have had when he drained his glass before the burning ship engulfed him, "here's to our meeting then. It's a long road — but — you be there."

Then I turned away and left her, not even offering to take her hand. I knew she would like it better so. And some late pride had risen in me to show her that I too was ready to play for the greater stake, run for the farther goal. She walked with me across the hall and to the outer door, where the night was troubled with driving clouds and there were faint stars under them. On the step I turned, and now she spoke tumultuously, eagerly, like the child she really was.

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"They're all such cowards in the books! I want you to do the straight thing. I want you to be" — again she used the word that evidently glowed for her — "splendid."

And now I did take her hands and they did not resist me. I bent and kissed them, first the right hand, then the left.

"Good-by," I said, "my Lady, my dear Lady. I'll be there."

And whether I meant I would be at that tryst in a life after our waking from this, or whether I meant I'd fulfil what she besought of me, I do not know. But she knew I had faith, because the mother heart of her was wiser than my tongue, and I left her, I believed, not unhappy as I went out to my task. But I did not take that next train back to town. I chose a path that led off from the driveway and descended steeply, for I believed it would lead me to the strip of shingle where the water lapped the sands and where the sound of the sea would be more articulate. The path broke sheerly off at a breezy declivity, and this I scrambled down, and came plunging out on the sand. And there the water was lapping in a friendly monotone, and black to the sight, and I seemed to be in a silence with it and cries of the warning buoys, and above me were the lights on my lady's balcony. I paced up and down there, at first mad with joy, and I believe I sang and called aloud, and mouthed great lines out of the poets, deifying the sea. And then I quieted, and found my-

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self a cavelike indentation of the shore, and sat there in my solitude like primal man begun to be cognizant of destinies. The night seemed to be light about me because the earth itself was lighted. I saw into vast reaches, and knew that the final destiny is not yet, however long we live. And having seen that the final destiny is not yet, it was for the present enough. I was light-headed with the bright mystery of creation which seemed to give man, in the end, whatever he strongly seeks. I had indeed only begun to make my petitions to the god of wishes. I had desired that life should not be so tawdry and mean as it had been, and that I should put my hand on the topmost fruit of the tree of life, which I had thought then to be poesy; but now I had the topmost fruit and it was Ellen Tracy's love. Poesy might come, too, for I began to see the gifts are endless. You had only to desire and the noiseless lock of the treasury slipped and the treasure lay disclosed. And then the air grew chill, and I felt my clothes were damp, and, as it is toward morning, the currents of my life ran slowly, and it came upon me that though I had Ellen Tracy's love, another woman, that stranger woman, was my wife. And my son was her son, too, and we were pledged to him. And thinking that, I soberly, in the autumn chill, got me along the country road, now veiled by a raw mist, and so to the station and to town again.

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XXXI

AFTER I had gone home to Osborne Street and changed my clothes and eaten a giant's breakfast at an hotel, I went to Blake's lodgings, and found him where I expected, in bed. He was either in bed till noon or working like a horse, and this was one of the days when the bed had him. I had posted up to him in despite of the loyal slavey who said he was to sleep till twelve, and found him under the clothes, his great eyes glowering, his hair a tangled shock. On the floor were some sheets of thin blue paper covered with short lines in small, beautiful script. I had never seen him so unkempt, like a wonderful, strong animal in its lair, and it came over me that it would be a brave woman who should marry him, if she expected the small understandable usages of daily life — except Mary, of course. Mary was the only one to marry him, because she was the only conceivable woman who would expect nothing. At once her name was on his lips.

"I have asked her to marry me," he said, and I got the impression that having done it he was exceedingly scared. "Mary."

I waited, looking down at him.

"Well," I prodded. "What's she say?"

"She's thinking it over," said Blake.

I felt as if I had great, new knowledge of women and their love of men. I felt as if Blake knew no more

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about it than I had yesterday, and that he must be informed or he'd unwittingly break fragilities.

"She sets her life by you," I said, going back, in my solemnity, to a phrase of our old neighborhood.

His brows knitted, and under them the eyes grew dark.

"Don't tell me that," he said, and I could have laughed, for I saw he was terrified. He could ask her to marry him, that he might buy bread for her to eat, and also perhaps to satisfy that silent mandate of her own nature which laid upon him the bonds of its devotion; but if she loved him too much, that he couldn't face. For where was the coin in his treasury to redeem so rich a guerdon? Coined, minted for Ellen Tracy, and because she would have none of it, poured into the sea. But Mary did love him just that much, the whole measure of her soul, and that he'd got to face. Else where would she come out in this bankrupt bargain? I thought wisely of it since I had learned a great deal of the love that promises and cannot pay. What had I not promised to Mildred in that other springtime? And what had I to pay with? We should see.

"Mary adores you," I said obstinately. Things had gone too far for niceties in keeping Mary's secret, which even the breezes that fanned her might know, it was so mirrored in her honest eyes. "You've got a chance to make her awfully happy."

"I haven't got it yet," he growled, and I saw that if he could in dignity have withdrawn under the bed-

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clothes he'd have done it to escape me. "Go away. I've got to get up."

But I sat down in the chair by the bedside, first removing the blue paper and pencil waiting for more verse, and holding it while I talked. I had grown suddenly bold with him, my own problem was so stiff.

"Blake," said I, "if I should want to stay in Boston this winter, do you think I could find a job?"

"I thought you were halfway to Africa," he said. "Has that gone to pot?"

"I don't know," I told him. "The job hasn't gone to pot, if that's what you mean. It's mine still if I'll take it. But I don't know whether I shall take it."

"Then you're a fool," said Blake, summarily. "I suppose she's put a damper on it."

He never spoke of Mildred by her name, but only with the aid of that half-grudging pronoun. He disapproved of her, I had known for a long time, disliked her heartily. I had known it, as I say, though I had not owned it to myself; but now, at the pace life was taking, I permitted myself to recognize it plainly. But he went on.

"If you're staying for sentimental reasons, I've nothing to say. Every man has got to settle that himself. But if it's money — if you want a better job — don't come to me."

His eye was straying to the blue sheets on the floor. I believe he had caught an adjective he wanted to annihilate and he most heartily wished me elsewhere, I

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was the deterrent, the atom between him and his beloved task. Would Ellen Tracy have been an atom just the same if she had broken a crystal mood? And how about Mary? But that, I saw, could never be. Mary knew nothing about moods, but she would have scented them out as keenly as if she did, so did her soul rush in a glow of love to serve the soul of Blake. She would be forever present with the bread and wine of physical life, with the pillow for his head; but when there was a certain look in his eyes, then Mary would be forever absent — silent, breathless, dumb. After all, if he had a big work to do, as I fully believed, hadn't he a right to that passionate service though he could give only dog's wages, the task to follow humbly and watch him from an uncomprehending eye? Wasn't the life of one woman very little to throw into the nourishment of a great poet? I wasn't sure. But I was answering Blake.

"I don't want more money," I said. "I refuse to have more than I can get without selling myself. But I may have to cry small and go into close quarters. Could I get something on the dailies here?"

"It's a feather in your cap to have done that work in England," he said. "Yes, I suppose you could get something."

"Then," I asked him, "would you speak to Wadham about it — that is, if I want you to — tell him the best you think of me, and see if he'd give me a boost?"

Yes, he would do that. We both knew it would go

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a long way. Wadham was hooted in the courts of real literature, if they ever heard of him; but among the dailies he was looked upon as a conjurer fitted out with the formula for piling the circulation to the millions. Commercially he was reverenced. And Wadham in his turn had almost a feminine, a fanatical adoration of Blake, who could do the things Wadham couldn't, — write poetry and despise the dollar. It was a pretty strong pull. Wadham's former knowledge of me might help or it might not, but Blake's recommendation would go far.

So I left him, and he didn't wait for me to get out of the room before lunging over the side of the bed, to change the adjective, I knew. And I went home to Osborne Street, to sit down and think it all over, and then I meant to go down to the Port and tell my wife. To tell her what? That was what I had to think over. I didn't know. The moment I had closed the door behind me and stood there in the hall, absently wondering if I wanted to look at any of the circulars pushed through the letter slit to the floor, I knew by that unnamed sense we have that somebody was in the house. I walked softly into the drawing-room. The drawers of the desk were open, small pictures lay with their faces to the table, and a cabinet of rather precious lacquer was open, the key in the lock. I looked into the dining room. Nobody was there. Then, as softly, I went upstairs, to the guest chamber first of all. And there stood Mildred, her sleeves turned back from her

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slender arms, folding curtains. Other curtains lay on the bed where she had piled them. All the careful packing of the spring was being overhauled. I think I could hardly have made sound enough to attract her; but she too was drawn by that sense of an unexpected presence. She turned, and seeing me there in the doorway, gave a little cry. And then I knew just how I felt toward her. I had wondered, on the way to the house. It had seemed to me I must know exactly, before I saw her. Now I knew. I was sorry she could scream at sight of me — for it was I particularly and not because I had startled her — and that such a look of fear could throb into her eyes. I walked into the room and she, never forgetting to face me, stepped round the other side of the bed. It was a crude, tell-tale movement. She was putting something between us.

"I didn't know you were here," I said.

"No."

Then her agitation seemed so out of proportion to my coming that I began to think, and I saw why she was there in this haste of preparation. She was going away, and she was packing up what things she might of those that had endowed our house, to take them with her. And I was sorry for her. My heart was so low in me that this heaviness of sorrow was all I could manage. I couldn't think of Ellen Tracy or of that gigantic passion of the sea: all that was as a great goddess, always regnant, always to be worshipped, but withdrawn behind a veil that I might do homely tasks

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and mend the kitchen fire. And I saw my way plain. I was always to mend the kitchen fire. The ever-burning altar blaze was not for me. Blake and his brother poets would tend that, and I should see its glow, and worship, too. But I had taken upon me the homely things whereby the earth — the earth owned by every man, not the planet swinging before the poet's rapt regard — that this earth may live in cleanliness and wholesome life. I pointed to a chair. I felt, if I had taken one to her she would have run from me anywhere, like a distraught animal into the wall, or toward me to beat upon my breast with her impotent hands. She did sink into the chair and I took another and asked her, trying to make my voice the one she knew before our dreadful yesterday: —

"Don't you think we'd better leave things as they are till we pack up for good?"

She gave a little gasp, still of fear, I thought, and could not answer me. I tried again.

"You'll think I'm a brute, but I've got to fight it out about this house. We can't live here. We can't afford it another minute."

With necessity her courage rose.

"There's no question of my living here," she said. "I'm going away."

"Where are you going?" I asked her, and she answered: —

"I don't know yet. I may go abroad. It doesn't matter very much while you're in Africa. There

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couldn't be any scandal. I think I shall go abroad — with Egerton."

"No," said I, "you'll not go abroad. You won't go anywhere. You'll stay with me."

"You are going to Africa," she said, and at once I knew what I had decided.

"I am not going," I told her.

She gave a little cry of what seemed utter exasperation.

"Have you given that up?"

"Yes," I told her, and she asked, "Why?" adding, with a flooding reproach, "How could you, a chance like that?"

Then I saw, whether wisely or not, that there had better be no paltering between us. At the moment of seeing her I had realized again that she was alien to me, a strange woman with whom I was yet, by my own vow, condemned to live. And I knew at last, and was ashamed of knowing, that she had a fear of me. She would never fight out an issue in the open, though she would eternally dodge and quibble if I were not to know. Her apprehension seemed almost as crude a thing as physical fear, and feeling that, I had a sickness of compassion for her: for surely it was terrible that a creature of that delicate poise should recoil at sight of me in my brutality of brawn. But things had got to be understood between us and on that understanding we must act.

"Mildred," I said, and at her name she glanced

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shrewdly up, as if it showed some new softness in me. "Will you give Gorham back his money?"

"No."

Her lips formed the word, but noiseless though it came, she looked immutable.

"Then," said I, "I've got to retrench, and pay it back myself."

Her face distorted in an ugly emotion I would not try to name.

"You must be a fool," she said, and having said it she stood ready to fight me on my own ground. She plucked up argument. "If you are going to take that on your shoulders, why do you give up the very contract you could make money by?"

I threw out the shameful truth.

"I can't be away."

"You mean I am not to be trusted?" she asked. "You've got to watch me?"

Something broke in me, and I found myself talking hot and fast.

"You are going to live in the house with me and eat the bread I earn for you. You are going to clothe yourself with the money I earn. If you keep Gorham's money, you will keep it as it is, intact. You will give me an account of it from time to time. If I see by the bank's balance that it has diminished, by God, I—" Here I stopped. It seemed to me there was no measure to what I should do. Yet, after all, what could I do? I did not know, and even if she had not been overborne

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at the moment by something in me that did unmistakably cow her, neither could she have told.

"You think I ought to be punished," she said, "and you have arranged that for my punishment. To keep the money and not use it: that's your idea?"

"I don't ask you to keep it," I said. "I beg you not to. I beg you by every good thing that's been between us. There's the boy—" I stopped here. I was desperately moved, and as she saw it she grew colder and more easy in the certainty of having for the moment the whip hand.

"How have I hurt the boy?" she inquired contemptuously, and now the balance had shifted and I felt awkwardly at a loss before her: for nothing makes a man more foolish in seeming than to bring forth unformulated emotions before one who is scanning them judicially.

"O Mildred," I said, "let's think of the boy, let's think of nothing else. He can't grow up in our atmosphere and not get tainted unless we're square. He can't be allowed to live with a man that's a coward — and I should be a coward if I let another man support you. He can't live with you —"

Her face sank to a deeper pallor and she threw me the furtive look that had given me the sickness of sheer fright. It seemed to ask whether I knew her fully, and when it challenged me thus, my soul violently denied that I could ever know her, lest the knowledge should be to the undoing of my own endurance. Perhaps I

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was a coward, but I knew I could fight better in the dark. I felt I had made the only appeal I knew how to make in the name of the boy.

"Won't you do it?" I asked her. "Won't you give that money back?"

She was tired of my persistency. I had worn her out, and now she had a hard, metallic No for me.

"Don't ask me that again," she said. "My money is my own, and I shall keep it. As to not spending it —"

She paused and I answered wearily: —

"Yes, you can spend it, too, I suppose. It's all one if I pay him back."

And she looked as if again she could have called me a fool. I took out my watch and summoned again my manner of command. Poor as it was, it seemed to serve.

"Now," I said, "we'll put these things back or pack 'em ready to move, as you like. For before October first we clear the house. Shall we put them back?"

For a long time she seemed to be considering, her eyes bent on her hands lying in her lap. She was making her decision, I saw, perhaps for good and all. My gaze followed hers and fell upon the blue veining of her wrists, for the hands lay palm uppermost. The veining of her wrists I had kissed a thousand times. It had been one of the foolish, dear ceremonials between us, wherein, I could see now with the added light of that great globe above me like another sun, she had only

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acquiesced from some sad reason of sex triumphant. Could I kiss the channel of that blood now, the blood that seemed then to flow inevitably toward me and now as palpably away from me? No. To do it would be the blasphemous ceremonial of a rite outworn. What had been was the child of an old self, and the old self had died. Yet out of that mood had come a living creature, infinitely pathetic in that he looked now for his nurture to two who could not generate between them the warming sun of love, the sheltering cloud.

"Mildred," said I, "can't you and I be a good father and mother to the boy?"

She spoke coldly, and again as if she were tired of it all.

"I don't know why you should accuse me of not being a good mother."

"I don't," I said, and I did remember how healthy the little chap looked, how absolutely perfect, like a child of sun and air. "But I don't mean that. I mean, can't we pitch in and make the kind of atmosphere he ought to live in? — that sort of thing?"

But now she was looking at her watch.

"It is nearly twelve," she said. "If I am going to the Port, I must telephone for a cab."

I made a leap at domination.

"We won't go this noon," I said, with an assurance I didn't feel. "We'll go round and look at a house I saw yesterday, with a sign in the window."

"Where?" she asked.

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It was a modest street, a sort of suburb of our own. The houses were small, and fit because they were on an old model carefully restored, and I had looked at them longingly, as dwellings where I might feel at ease, because there I could pay my scot without straining. And to my infinite surprise she actually went — doggedly, I thought, but still with an outward acquiescence. She went over the little house — and a good little house it was — precise as to its detail and sharp-eyed for flaws. We seemed in these practicalities to have reached some community of interest; but when we had left the house she was again *distraite*, and the pall of silence fell between us. There was no time for a leisurely luncheon if we were to get a good train, and so I took her in a cab to the station and we had something there and were presently on the way to the Port. I was glad we had to be hurried. The little intimacies of a luncheon in a place where the world was making a pretence at delicate enjoyment would have been too much for us. And at the Port again we took a cab and in silence drove to the house. There I left her and waiting only until she had got in drove to the Hillsdale House where Gorham made his home. He was in, they told me, and my name was taken to him, and immediately I was conducted to his room. It was a wan, dreary room, transformed, doubtless through the sheer force of his habits, into something like an office. He had introduced a roll-top desk with its concomitants of letter file and cards in drawers. I don't know what

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he catalogued, but I believe he couldn't live without the outward flourishes of a commercial life. To say that he was surprised at my coming is not enough. He was stricken into an intense discomfort, and through the first part of our interview remained visibly uneasy. At once the telephone bell rang, and when he had taken down the receiver I heard my wife's voice. It was unmistakable. She was asking if he were alone.

"No," he said, with the shortness of embarrassment. "Got a caller."

And he hung up summarily. I did not sit down, and because I would not he propped himself by the mantel and stood there looking gloomily into the grate. I was right in thinking cousin Thomas had greatly changed. The crude ambition of his clothes had altered to the unexacting lines of a business suit that had evidently seen much travel. His shiny black hair was too long, his tie a narrow string of black. Between his brows abode the lines of care. And he did not look at me. That was of no special importance to me; but I did feel that he was suffering an extreme of nervousness.

"Gorham," I said, "I've come round to have a talk."

"Well," said he, rather bitterly, "spit it out."

And after all I didn't know how I was going to say it. I had better be brief. I was willing to give offence.

"You have lent my wife some money," I said. "It was unnecessary, but we won't go into that. I'm going to make you a payment on it, give you my note for the rest, and tell you it won't be necessary again."

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He turned upon me. I think he was glad to have come to an issue, to find himself up against a man's formulæ and escape a woman's casuistry.

"Look here," he said. "I didn't lend her that money. I gave it to her."

"No," said I. "You lent it to us both. That's the only way we could take it. That's why I'm paying you."

He looked inexpressibly haggard, in a yellow sort of way, and baited as he was, as if he were going to cry.

"Good God!" he said irritably, not to God indeed, but really to the snarl of circumstance. "I can't be paid back. That would be the last note!"

"You mustn't say that again, Gorham," I warned him, "to me or anybody else."

"'Course I shan't say it," he returned. "Do you s'pose I go round talkin' about a thing like that?"

"You won't say it to me again," I said. I felt myself growing hot. "If you do, I shall be obliged to lick you as I'd lick any little cub for doing what he was forbidden."

"Well, I know you forbid it," said he. "Needn't tell me that." The worried look intensified. "Do you suppose I meant —" And there he stuck.

So he had remembered I forbade it! How had he been persuaded?

"That'll do, Gorham," I warned him. "We don't want a row in this damned boarding house."

But he was not afraid, though I overtopped him.

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A little fellow, yet he would hang on with all the terrier in him.

"Now, look here," said he. "I've thought about Milly for years."

"We won't bring names into it," I said stiffly, foolishly perhaps.

"But we've got to," said cousin Tom, screwing up his face again. "Milly's all the world to me." And immediately I felt a queer tolerance of him, he seemed so well-meaning and so at the mercy of a woman's lust for power. "I've thought about her all my life, practically. Why, I made my money for her. I come back, and she's married, and I've got my money on my hands. Good Lord!"

It looked to him monstrous. Here he was with the initial ambition of his life fulfilled. He had stored his money, and the goddess he had meant to heap it before was removed from her niche, and his largess could only be poured out in the temple of an angry god. I thought I understood him in that minute better than I had in any of my approximations. Here was Mildred, the apex of his fulfilled desires. He had meant to climb the mountain and find her there. He had climbed, his gold heavy upon him, and the goddess had demanded tribute. The mandate of the angry god wouldn't sound very terrifying when Mildred looked upon him with her spring-tide face. Had he, who had thought business dilemmas were the only knots in life, found himself up against life itself? Why

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did he have that look of downfall and decay? I was sorry for the man in him gone to blank ruin and regret.

"The one thing you've got to do," I said, "is to give me your word of honor you won't give or lend to my family anything that is yours — either your checks or your bank stock or your motor or your chauffeurs. You've got to accept us as acquaintances who, from some inherited prejudice, are going on their own. And frankly, since you may find it hard to withhold your hand, you'd better cut us altogether."

He was looking at the grate again thoughtfully and as if we were settling the most definite and weighty of business propositions — business always. He looked up at me sharply. "Forbid me the house?" he asked.

"We're going to move," I said. "I suggest that you cut us. That's all."

I sat down at his table now and made him out a check for as much as I could well afford, for the moment, a broad slice out of my three months' pay. I also signed my note for the remainder of the sum put to Mildred's credit and passed him the slips together.

"There," I said. "That square?"

He took the paper waveringly, miserably indeed; but I didn't stay to debate his hesitancies.

"That's all," I said, and I opened the door and shut it after me before he could reply. But when I was down three steps, he had flung open the door and called to me. He was yellow with some emotion that seemed to do with a desire to placate.

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"See here," he said, "come back a minute."

I did go back. He shut the door again.

"See here," said he — it was a phrase that seemed to start him — "you think Milly hadn't ought to have taken that? If I thought I'd made trouble for Milly —"

"Make your mind easy," I said curtly. "You've made no trouble — none you can save her from."

He was considering miserably.

"I meant well by Milly," he said, shaking his head over his own mischance and much moved for her. "I never thought it would come to this."

"You've simply been a fool." I had an angry pity for him, a desire to bid him put the earth between us and forget. But all I could say was this again, — "You're a fool, a fool."

And I left him staring down at my back, I could believe, and tramped away.

Yet what had she asked me in the first moment of betrayal? "Do you accuse me?" The words had poisoned me, and the poison gave me, I believed, that same sense of sick dismay I had seen in the man I called a fool.

XXXII

My hit in England served me well, and so did Blake's and Wadham's clever offices. I got a job on one of the big dailies, an editorial stunt that would keep me awake to the farthest stretch of my powers. I

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couldn't say I "didn't much care if there was disaffection in Persia so long as the sunset held red," as Blake had been known to say, and as I truly used to feel. Whether the modern game was big or little, of vast import or a brief skirmish for place and power, I was in for playing it. When I told Mildred I'd got my job, she showed a decent interest. That was all I could expect of her. She couldn't know that if I hadn't walked into that warm pocket of a place I should have been as desperate as a starving rat. For I had that big necessity on my shoulders to release her and to release myself from all slightest obligation to cousin Thomas; meantime she and the child had to be fed. I had taken the little house, this in a haste, the strange twin to that of our beginnings when I had leased the one on Osborne Street. It was I who did the moving. Mildred, at that juncture, had seemed to falter and give out in a sudden way, and I urged her to go down to a quiet hotel by the sea for the last autumn days, she and the boy, and let me set up our gods alone. She did it without question, in great relief, it seemed to me. Perhaps she really could not bear the strain of seeing our belongings go out of the big house and into the little one. I would do the best I could, I told her, to get the furniture placed as she would have it, and when she came back she could shift it round again. To this she assented, more than half indifferently. I had an idea that she perhaps never cared for houses in that intimate, unreasoning

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way women have, though she knew so unerringly how to clothe and coax them into harmony. And since the little, common house where we were going was not likely to attract our social betters, she had no interest in it at all. But here, in a sense, I wronged her, for when she came back she did shake it into the best shape possible, though without eagerness of pleasure. She had a dutiful sense of the exactions of civilized life. That never failed her.

One late afternoon while she was still away and the furniture stood about like friendly visitants come to afternoon tea and trying to recall a past association, I stood in the middle of the dining room and wondered whether I was accomplished enough to unpack the china and set it up. There were no expert movers' services for me this voyage. I was saving even my small change for cousin Thomas. The current of my thought shifted from the china as I noted the space between the windows where the magnificent sideboard spread too far. I laughed a little, softly, remembering the dear philistine oak one still in storage. I wondered whether we might not sell this inlaid monarch of a thing, this dignified reproach to our humbler state, and bring in that kind reminder of the love of friends. No, it wouldn't do. It would jar the reverend chairs and table until they might forget their mortising and fall apart. Besides I wasn't prepared to call upon Mildred to suffer daily wretchedness of that sort. I might take away her high affiliations, but I

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wouldn't thrust her into the abyss with an oak sideboard. And while I smiled at my own philistine taste and the diversity of the gods we worshipped, again out of the wrong side of my mouth, there was a ring at the door, which was ajar, and having thus announced herself, in walked Mary.

"I saw you through the window," she said. "I knew you were alone by the way you looked."

If ever I wanted to take comfort and kindliness into my arms, I wanted at that moment to take Mary in her shabby dress. It is the height of midsummer poetry to talk about "queen lily and rose in one." Mary was aunt and mother in one, and that, when you are moving to a house your wife despises, is a tonic to the soul. But I didn't spill over with my grateful redundancies. I just took her bag, no doubt stuffed full with work to be done after hours, and made her sit down in a chair strayed from reception days and looking very haughty inside such modest walls. Mary glanced about her with a practical eye.

"Looks as if I could give you a hand here," she said. "What's in that box? china?"

Oh, yes, it was china, but that wasn't Mary's business. She was too tired.

"Sit there a minute," I told her, "and we'll go to dinner somewhere."

But a quite animating red had run into her cheeks. She unpinned her hat and carefully turned back her cuffs.

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"You let me help," said she. "I should admire to. It drives me just crazy to fix up a house. I helped aunt Cely to break up; though that was kind of sad. But this settling business!" She looked as if nothing could be more delirious.

I let her do it. Indeed you couldn't have stopped her. Time was when some stiff propriety might have told me that Mildred wouldn't want another woman disposing her cups on their shelves. Diaphanous scruples of that sort had passed, with scores of other things. I even thought that Mildred might be practically glad to have the deed done, no matter by whose hand, and I also considered, with a very real emotion, that if any hands could bring a consecration to this little makeshift house, the hands were Mary's. So she stood at the cupboard and I unpacked dishes and passed them to her, and she wiped them and set them up and we talked happily.

"I suppose they ought to be washed, by good rights," said Mary, "but I'll give 'em a lick and a promise now, and we'll just get 'em in so you'll know where you are."

With the last light of sunset they were all in handy places, and I could breathe. Tables and chairs I knew how to tackle, as being more a man's size.

"Now," said I, "time's up. We'll go to dinner."

So we washed our hands and wiped them on a corner of the towel Mary had been using, and got quite merry over it. I began to feel as if there were

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some gay spots in houses, after all. But when Mary had pinned on her hat, and I was waiting for her, I could see she was very grave indeed.

"Oh, dear!" said she, "I haven't said a word I came to say."

I sat down at once, leaving her to do it after me as the best persuasion I could offer that I wasn't in a hurry. It was something, I could see, that couldn't be said as we went along. Mary sat down and took a letter from her bag. It was stamped and ready for the post, and she kept looking at it thoughtfully.

"This," she said, "is to Mr. Blake."

I knew what it was. It was an answer to that half savage, half pathetic cry of his, "I have asked Mary to marry me."

"You haven't been in a hurry to answer him," I said, not knowing how far she meant to let me in. "Mustn't keep a poet in suspense, Mary. It's bad for him."

"I couldn't help that," said Mary. Her eyes were sadly troubled, and yet they looked as if she had known what she was about. "I've told him No."

"The dickens you have!" I said. I was half hurt for him and terribly sorry for her who was losing him.

"I want to put it to you," she went on, "whether I haven't done right. He doesn't — love me." This she said with a gentlest dignity that admitted no argument from me.

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"You're dear to him, Mary," I said, "most awfully dear."

"I know it," said she. "So I am to you. We've weathered a good many gales together, all of us. But that isn't — love."

This, too, she said with an indescribable beauty of emphasis. It was as if all her lifelong pondering upon the hunger of the heart had run into the one word and made it bloom.

"But," I said — for I wanted, if I could, to push Mary inside the door of heart's content — "we're none of us under thirty. We don't demand the same things —"

"Don't we?" asked Mary, in a flash.

"I mean," I stumbled on, "there is a kind of affection quite different from first love. It's well worth having. It's a warm, sweet thing. He could give you that, Mary. It would never fail you."

"Would you take it in my place?" she countered. "Would you?"

"No," I said.

She smiled at me. I had contented her.

"That's it," she owned. "I can't let him give me anything less than the best. It isn't because I'm proud. I'd be glad and thankful to die for him this minute. But it would be bad for him. Why, Mr. Redfield, you know it would."

I did know it. I knew Blake had got to keep to his own hard pallet of life, his bread and water of the

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untarnished will. So only could he write his verse. I could see Mary padding his cell of caged affection: but it would be a cell. This was a bird of the air, an eagle. If he had found his true mate, and they had together made their eyrie, the air would still have been his home. We would not chain him to a perch. But there was Mary, too, to think of. I couldn't shut the door of paradise on her. She was trying to shut it and I was keeping it open with my toe.

"He'll be awfully forlorn," I said.

"Well," said Mary, quickly, as if she'd thought it out, "men of that kind have got to be. So far as I can see, he's got to be lonesome and he's got to be poor and he's got to grow old. But he'll have his poetry. You said that yourself."

"Yes," I said, "he'll have his poetry."

"And if I let him do a thing like that — what he asked me, you know — he'd be stepping down. He wouldn't be the same man. And it would eat into him. And that would hurt his poetry, now wouldn't it?"

How earnest she was I cannot describe. This was the biggest thing that had ever come to her, and she was meeting it with all the brain and all the will and all the love she had. "Now isn't it so?" she insisted. "Don't you think I'm right?"

Well, I did think she was right. Blake was our knight peerless. We wouldn't take him off his horse, even though it was to set him down to a well-filled trencher with a kind maid to wait upon him. He should

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go out into briery ways and suffer hunger, if need were, and thirst and cold. But he should go singing.

"Then," said Mary, "I'll mail my letter. Now let's start. You're hungry as a bear."

And having consigned our knight to exile, we set out, our hearts very warm toward each other and the pathetic world. And in the west above the rose-flush there was a star, and it came to me that this might be the star that had led the dancing measure when I had written my nuptial song, and the sight of it shook me to my soul. For it had a message for me still. The other day was dead, and the woman for whom I wrote the nuptial song loved me no more and perhaps had never loved me. But the star still lived, and love lived in an imperishable splendor, flung to me from the star. The world was full of lovers, some false, but many true. And Ellen Tracy was in the world, as shining as the star. Indeed, it seemed to me that there was a beaming pathway from the star straight down to her, and my love, if it were great enough, might climb upon it. And though we had turned Blake into exile, and cut Mary off from the task she longed for, sheer humble service for him, even he didn't seem to me forlorn, but rather crowned by his great, lone destiny. And Mary and I didn't seem forlorn, though we were a little like two babes in the wood unfriended by roofs and walls. For she had shot her arrow at the gold of the supreme right, and after that there's very little more that you can

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have. And I, though I might never set my lips to love, had the star and Ellen Tracy. But of Mildred I did not think at all.

XXXIII

I UNDERSTOOD perfectly that I was not to see Ellen Tracy, and for a time the prohibition looked easy. We all know what it is when the beloved have just left the room in our house of life. Something of their aura remains behind. There is the trembling of the draperies moved by the wind of their departing. The air is still in rhythm from their motions. The scent of their divinity is upon the breeze. It seems easy to live without them and fulfil their biddings, to such an exalted obedience have they left us. But the room settles down to its impersonal calm. It forgets. It responds to other visitants. Then we know we are bereft.

For a time I was superbly indifferent to any warmer need than that of fulfilling the highest will of Ellen Tracy. Then the virtue went out of me, and I knew I was alone. I harbored a bitter reproach of her, because I believed that if she had not cast me out of her thought, I should have got news of her by the underground service of according minds. I had, I see now, felt very righteous toward Mildred, whom I had been upholding to an ideal of conduct imposed upon us both; but now, in my desolation, I recog-

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nized a childish need of her. I could have laughed to think of it. I did laugh sometimes in a wry fashion, as they say, "out of the other side of my mouth." For the ironies of life were pretty hard upon us both. Here were we, pent up together to live out our span of years. I regarded another woman with an adoring worship, every voice within me crying out louder and louder every day to go to her and telling me with the sound of many trumpets that it was righteous for me to go, and I was living in the intimacy of home with the woman who did not love me, who could not, perhaps, love any man, but who had a fierce ingrained desire to establish herself in the world. It was like the tiger's steel-sinewed fight to live. She was, I had learned, a creature of a cool virginity; but I believed she would sell herself to climb to the apex of social life. Whether she had sold herself, I could not let myself think; but sometimes I woke at night, that question of hers hissing into my ears like an ever-wakeful snake. Sometimes after the snake had hissed at me and I lay there hot under a man's abased sense of a home invaded and his son's inheritance shattered, I would hear her stirring in the next room, doing something for the boy, and I had to wonder whether she loved him. But she was a perfect mother. The visitors all said so, though there were fewer of them now. Miss Harpinger's contingent had dropped off when we moved into a humbler house, but the dear old church people kept on coming. Some came who

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had never come before. I believe they had guessed at our fallen fortunes and sought us out because of them. I loved them for it. It seemed to me they would help Mildred's social soul to live, now she was stranded on her island of discontent. I didn't mind now whether they asked me why I wasn't doing my beautiful dialect stories. I replied quite humbly, and even said I might sometime; and one day when a warm-hearted pack of them had gone I said to Mildred, in my gratitude for their upholding, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Unitarian."

But she looked at me seriously and said, with a musing doubt in her tone: —

"I've been thinking of leaving Doctor Everest's and going to Saint Jerome's."

"For God's sake, why?" I said, accepting my belated cup of tea. I had been so eagerly and ingratiatingly entertaining, and had passed so many cups to ladies I hoped would come again and please Mildred, that I had forgotten to take any sustenance of my own. "You aren't changing your creed, are you?"

She was looking past me and deliberating, on creeds, I innocently thought.

"You see," she said, "we made a mistake. If we had gone to Saint Jerome's in the first place, I should have got into the charities there. I should have known a set of people I never shall know now, living as we are —" She stopped abruptly, and left the room. I had guessed she had made a resolve not to complain

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of our humbler style of living, this when she accepted it, and she had never broken through. There were some admirable things about Mildred.

This need of mine for Ellen Tracy, whom I loved, and of Mildred, whom I didn't love, were strangely, tiringly blended in me. My path to Ellen Tracy was straight as a beam of light. I could see every inch of the radiant way until it found me in her arms, as I was, I knew, locked in her heart But my need of Mildred was a curious thing. Our interests, in all the outward issues of life, were identical. She assured me of my comfort. I made for her protection. We had the converging interest of our son. I frankly needed her to be kind to me. I couldn't bear to live in the desolation of her lack of favor. My hearth was swept, but it was not warm. I sometimes thought if we could get into the depths of each others' minds we should not have been so poor. If she could have told me whether I was to think her stained or clean, and I could have believed her, if I could have set her apprehensive mind at rest by saying, "I shall never offer you my love again; it has gone beyond my will to fetter," — if we could have talked over the inchoate business of our lives with the perfect frankness of business partners — then, I felt, we should neither of us have felt so desolate. But in this community of speech touching my defection and her defection of another sort there seemed to be an indecency I couldn't face, even if we could have compassed it. For there was

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young Egerton Redfield, looking at us now impartially with the calm, glad eyes of perfect health, and saying virtually, "What a nice, warm, milky bready world you have created for me, you two old dears. What a high time we shall have when I grow up, and we can all three sit down and talk it over. We could now, except that I'm not speaking your eccentric language." How in the face of his wholesale acceptance of us, could I say to Mildred, "I don't love you. I am awake night and day with mad desire for one who is not you. I am trying to think I am waiting to possess her in paradise; but I want to possess her now"? How could Mildred make to me that other sad confession the question told me she could make, not that she was a wanton through the beguiling of her blood, but that she had overthrown a decent man's intention to keep his word? No. Egerton had us quite under his tiny thumb. I found at that time that the god I worshipped regularly was decency, plain decency. I loved the little, common ways of life with an ache in my throat. I loved to see the man in the street sitting down to his dull dinner on the sidewalk, because I knew dutiful hands had packed it in its pail. They might not have been loving hands, but they were worn hands that were, unconsciously to themselves, but with the patience of inherited habit, holding up the roof of the edifice we have built to live in. I had at times wild impulses to tell Mildred she might leave me and I would still support her. That would set her free from what I could but

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feel was my reproachful presence. It would free her breath that came so dutifully calm while we had our commonplaces of talk. But was it to leave her free? I knew it was not, in that soul within my soul that still told me the truth when I would listen to it. It was so that I might, with less reproach from Ellen Tracy, invade my lady's heart, even her domain of thought by letters only, and pour my passion out upon the page.

But after I had been thinking these things out for a day or two and was on the brink of the abyss of wild disclosure, young Egerton would put his head against his mother's arm, and she would bend her pale cheek down to him, and they made the world-old picture of the Mother and the Child. And I would turn my forces of revolt upon myself and ask what flowering of my passion — which, I surely knew, had roots within the deepest earth — could compensate me for seeing my little son begin his life with a stained inheritance? While he drank his milk and went out to regard the world with his arrogant baby stare, we should be preparing this tawdry fardel for him to take upon his young shoulders and bear through all his life. And then I would go tamely off to work, the give-and-take of arduous days among men cleverer than I with a devilish up-to-date appositeness, and for days again Ellen Tracy, to my tired and tamed endurance, would seem but as a miniature I wore within my breast.

Of the more tumultuous days verse came and was still-born. When I lay in my bed looking at Orion,

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the king of the heavens, measured lines beat into my brain. They were sonnets, all but complete, and they were, as I could catch at the cloak of beauty fugitive, the soul and flesh of Ellen Tracy. They sang of her, her hair, her eyes, her body which was mine, through earth's determinate word, and her dear soul that sat inviolate to guard the gates. But I never wrote those sonnets down. I let them pass, like beautiful birds flying rhythmically, the sun upon their wings. Sometimes they stooped to me divinely. They hovered, brooded. Sometimes even the silence had a voice, and questioned whether they were not to stay. I even thought they were saddened because I would not hold them by one pinion, and put them in the gilded cage of print to sing for immortality. Sometimes I agonized in doubt whether I had authority to fan the flight of wings so beautiful. But Ellen Tracy seemed to have laid bonds upon me. They were stronger and stronger as the time of my exile from her dragged along, as if I too were augmenting them by welding of my own. I thought I saw dimly what I was here for, in this toilsome world, or what, being here, I was to do. I was to do the simple, honest tasks. I was to feed my wife and child, to uphold the sane decency of the covenant we had entered into. If I had strength beyond this for warmer deeds, deeds all red and gold with blazonry, incredibly happier I. But I must see to the stability of my own house. I must look to its foundations, and until they were laid, I couldn't go any higher.

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If Almighty God wanted His poems written, he would send angels with pens and angels with trumpets, and angels with authority to command the trumpets to blow and the pens to write. I, Martin Redfield, had to take care of my wife and child.

XXXIV

This chapter is about literature, and the reader who has a vague yet confident impression that literature is the cupboard where you find reading for an idle hour, or a tool for cramming on special subjects, a cinch for getting a livelihood or seeming brighter than your neighbors, had better skip it, unregretfully. He won't in the least understand what I am going to say, not because it is so profound — for it is self-evident — but because it is a certainty bred in an atmosphere that is foreign to him. I understand that the atmospheres of different planets are of unlike densities, and it is therefore plain that a being bred in one density could not live in another, if he were transported to it. This is not to the discredit of his apparatus for living. He is calculated for one environment and might as easily have been turned out for another. Only he wasn't. Therefore you who accept the making of books as one of the industries, prolific in praise, *passez outre*, as saith the prince of women warriors, Jeanne d'Arc. There is nothing for you here.

It is to be understood, first of all, that certain men

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and women have a passion for the arts, for music, painting, and the printed word. Genius is something more than the capacity for taking pains. We take pains because the something more is there: the fervid aptitude that, in its extreme, is passion. It is the passion for the written word that makes what we call the literary man. Words are sentient creatures to him. He regards them with the unreasoning love the bibliophile has for even the backs of books. It is a besetment, a fantasy, if you will — all the manifestations of a tremendous aptitude. It hurts him if you fall down upon a false quantity; he is even undone when a comma is misplaced. His mind is ever upon the highest planes of attainment, where sound and sense accord in that inevitable beauty which comes we knew not whence, but is of God. Some men are born to such a mastery of the word, such a recognition of their own passion for it, that we name them master. Such was Blake. He came into his vocation full-fledged. I came more slowly. At first, as I have said, life beguiled me. But the form of beautiful words wrought upon me more and more until I was like the shepherd on the mountain who, guessing at the shapes of gods in clouds and nymphs in watercourses, comes down to ancient Athens and sees the gods in stone. He learns the worship of the god in marble, the language man has chosen for saying to other men, "This is the god defined." The cloudy god may be the real one; but he slips away, the night can banish him. But

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once get the god into marble and you have him for all time, and your children shall inherit him. So with the wonder of the earth and the affairs of man. You are knocked down by them, their delightsomeness, their mystic value. And then you learn they can be reproduced in words, and it makes a new music for you, and that is literature. It is life, warm life, poured into lovely molds.

Now this matter of literature is of the greatest importance. It is important that the man with the aptitude should retain the rich, keen zest of life to impart to life's great moving image. Yet "this was sometime a paradox." He should be walled into solitude for the performance of his task, a peace tremulous with leaves and birds. Yet if you cloister him, it will be to the deed's undoing: for he of all men needs the view of life from mountain tops, the hand-to-hand encounter with it in valleys and on plains. He needs to know the feel of its big knocks, the smell of gardens and decay, the depletion of hungers, the madness of every vehemence of thirst. For he cannot communicate what he has not received, and he has chosen — or God has chosen for him, by giving him the aptitude — to interpret life to you. And how shall he interpret what he does not fully know?

I have often thought the man of letters should have two full lives: the life of action when he flings himself about the world, listening, fighting, laughing, crying, and the life of the scribe who, within his cell, scarce

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has time to hear the bee's murmurous pollen talk outside the window. And the bee is the simile. He flies far, and he comes home thick with honey-dust. He comes home and loses himself in the community to store his load away. And there it is, the community, the perfect expression of the common life. No man liveth unto himself, not even the privileged man of letters.

I have told how I learned at one point in my life that poetry was, for me, the supreme reward. One step led but to another, and, that other once attained, I was telling myself that, after all, the supreme reward was the love of Ellen Tracy. But now at last — and I have not yet seen another step beyond — I believed, dear as these goals must ever be, that there was a narrow land I had to live in and that was mine inevitably. Perhaps it was a road, for the life-long vision of the road was ever with me; and this, I saw, I had to follow, not knowing where it led. It was a road where neither poesy nor love could light me in any earthly sense, and it led from my house to the office and back to the house again. I couldn't be out challenging the world to yield me lovely types for literature. I had to let life hammer at me as I ran, and I had no cloistered seclusion of the mind to slip into when I got home, even to tell how these knocks had felt. The persuasion that moved me, day by day, was not the inner persuasion to write verse, but to keep myself in form, to make my wife as content as might be and my son

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in love with us. In my first youth I had followed the call of life. I had heard its summons louder than the printed word. Now I loved the printed word most dearly, but I was back again at the beginning. Life, I knew, was more than literature.

Perhaps you wonder why, if I had the aptitude I talk about, I couldn't write my poetry as an avocation. If lines were singing through my ears, it would be a child's task to scratch them down. But this matter of poetry is a matter of emotion, of vibration, of the human machine throwing off the waves of over-generating. And I hadn't any surplus energy. I was still strong as a man need be; but I had none of that wild life of the brain that poets know. It sounds rather sickly to say it, but I was simply enduring; I wasn't living, in any vivid sense. I wasn't even suffering vividly. For I had found that if I chose to disregard Ellen Tracy's prohibition and give my mind full rein and think of her, I was undone. Out of that mood of wild revolt and quickened pulses, I might indeed have written poetry. But I could not have gone to the office, a sane man, and held my place, competing with younger men whose hearts were strong enough to race toward tragedy and still maintain the serviceable beat of warm blood to the brain. They had the advantage of me every time. They liked their work, most of them. They went at it slap-dash, life was so new to them, it had so much to tell. I had to keep my face set stiffly toward one goal,—the "making good." To that

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end I put Ellen Tracy away, deep in my heart, as if indeed she had died, and I must not dare to think of her until the moment of my following. I saw once a hollow apple tree filled up with gravel and cement to the end that it might bear more fruit. I saw it other years, and it did bloom and bear divinely; but I was conscious of a hurt in looking upon its patient, kindly health, for I knew how heavy it was at heart. In my heart too was heaviness sealed in; but warmth also, sometimes a warmth quite wonderful to feel, and I knew what this was. It was Ellen Tracy's heart, sealed in and beating there. I think there is a pitiful misconception in our looking upon men who have put away an image they have worshipped. It is not that they forget, but that they cannot keep it before their eyes and in the exaltation of daily longing, live. And live they must, unless they shirk the game.

So far as literature went, a nobler passion had been born in me and I could neither fulfil it nor return upon the old tracks that had given me sustenance. I could no more have written a story of Little Italy now than I could have sat down with an easy mind to fox-and-geese. And if I could, the magazines would none of me, save for a scattering periodical now and then that could not pay for the last new thing in authors. Others had arisen, some of them working after my own precise recipe. There were Armenian stories now, Chinese stories; and I knew from inner evidence that they were faked. No Armenian could have looked into

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their mirror and seen his own face; no Chinaman. New men had simply hit on the old tool and used it with the brilliant energy of youth. So the base task I would none of, and the high task would none of me. The Muses are jealous jades. They will accept no fragmentary dole. You may be earning bread for little sons and paying off unwelcome cousin Thomases, but they make no distinction. You simply have had strength to crawl to the spring, or time and money to motor there, or you have not. You've got to be very fascinating indeed for them to bring the cup to you. And I was no young sprig of promise. I hadn't a fascination left.

As to the matter of my refusing the poems that came to me out of my love for Ellen Tracy, I cannot tell whether that was a mistake or not. Perhaps I decided it out of my heart, in the first exaltation of finding and losing her, and not out of the clearness of the mind. But that was done and over. The love songs came no more. And whether it was right or whether it was wrong, the deed of a wastrel or the blind sacrifice of a lover who must serve his lady, I burned the novel once called "Ellen Tracy" because it was so personal to her and to me. That she had not required of me; but I did it for her sake.

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XXXV

THE time had gone on until young Egerton clattered in one day and threw his skates down and announced that he'd begun algebra. I was standing in the dining room doorway, talking to Mildred about the price of coal, and she was sitting at her desk very much as she had been that day at the Port when I had learned my exile from her. Mildred had lost her spring-tide face. She had faded, not to the beauty of the petal that withers in the sun, but to a spiritless forecast of old age. I have seen dropped larkspur petals that are like blue jewels, almost transcending the living flower, and I have seen the faces of women where wifehood and motherhood have burnt into a white ash of ethereal loveliness. Yet what bright coals are glowing underneath that veil! There was, I thought suddenly, in one of the moments of bitter truth we tell ourselves, nothing in her face — nothing perhaps but discontent. I had been able to put nothing into it, and I could draw nothing out.

I gave young Egerton a little push toward her.

"Go and tell her," I said. "I don't even know what algebra is. Don't talk to me about it. It makes me shy."

He went, hooting at my bluff: for if there was one person who knew everything in the heavens above and the earth beneath, from the way the fire engines go to the deeds of the Greek heroes, that person, in the

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eyes of young Egerton Redfield, was I. He didn't know how hard I'd had to cram for him.

His mother felt knowingly at a button coming loose, and turned him about in the salutary way mothers have, and as I stood there watching them, my eyes filled achingly. Perhaps they did it the more easily because I had seen Ellen Tracy's face that morning, and it was wet with tears. I had been to aunt Patten's funeral, unsummoned, but because I had to go, and I had seen my beautiful lady, and across her tear-wet face there had run a little smile at sight of me. That smile seemed to have broken some of the bands about my heart. I had come home with my eyes opened to the secrets of other faces, and my heart all warm to give ease to other hearts. As I stood there, my mind ran back over the days since I had spoken with Ellen Tracy: for the last time had been that night down at Hopeful Sands when she had laid upon me her dear, unreasoning will to keep on being "splendid." In that time Mildred had withered, Mary had turned into a lodging-house keeper — for she got rheumatism and her fingers wouldn't serve her at the typewriter — Blake looked like a wreck, but still of noble dignity (and now nobody bought his poetry at all, it was so full of mystic wonders), and cousin Thomas, indescribably seedy, had set up an office with the name of a South American mine on the door, and sat there, being persistent, and dreading, I fully believed, to see my checks come in, as a man dreads retributive lightning.

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I didn't know how I looked, myself. I hadn't any time for mirrors. I knew I had done two novels of the way life seemed to me down town, and nobody was reading them because they were "unpleasant." I knew I had in my desk a book of sonnets that told, in an abstract way, what I thought I believed about the great game of life. I meant to leave the sonnets there, and after I was dead my son could do what he liked about publishing them. They bore testimony to what I had learned: but now as I dwelt on Mildred's withered face and remembered the sweet bloom of Ellen Tracy's, I thought I had one more sonnet to write. For stronger than any impulse in me that day, stronger than my answering joy at sight of Ellen Tracy's face and its subtile assurance that she had not forgotten, stronger than my ever-during belief in my eternal tryst with her, or my satisfaction in my son's stout legs and hard cheeks and his assault upon algebra, stronger than all these was my sudden sorrow that Mildred was not happy. What could I bring her to call light and color into that dull face? Not man's love for woman: my love was given away. And if it had not been, she did not want it of me. There was nothing to offer her but the tender compassion that responds to every call, the world-sorrow that wakes at sight of the world-pain.

"Don't you think that's wonderful?" I said to her, and she looked up at me and her face quickened in an unexpected way, perhaps at the quickening of mine. "All this algebra business? Don't you think it's wonderful — Little Mother?"

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